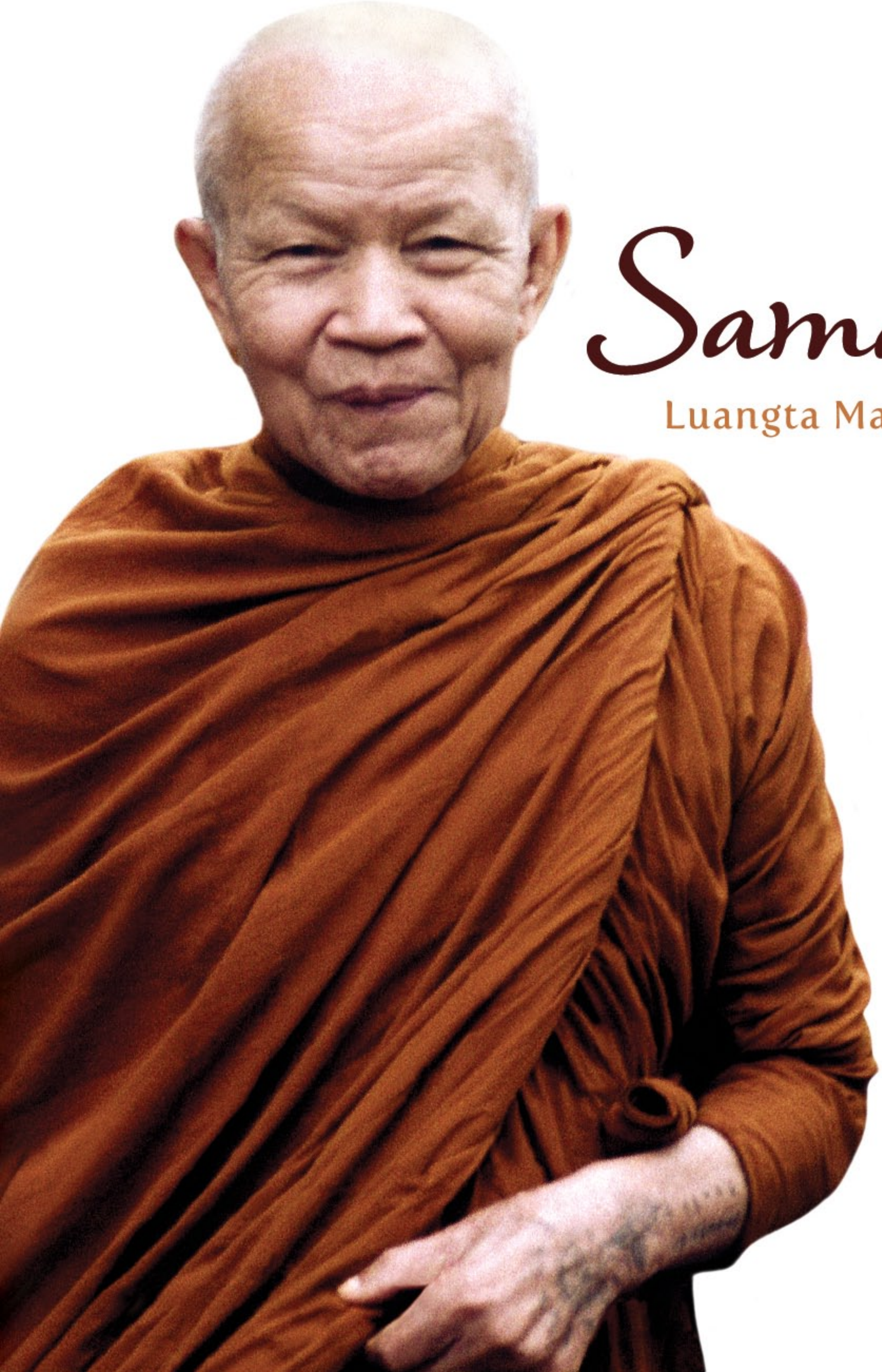


Samaṇa

Luangta Maha Boowa

"To behold a Samaṇa whose
Heart is free of defilement –
That is the highest Blessing."

Samaṇa

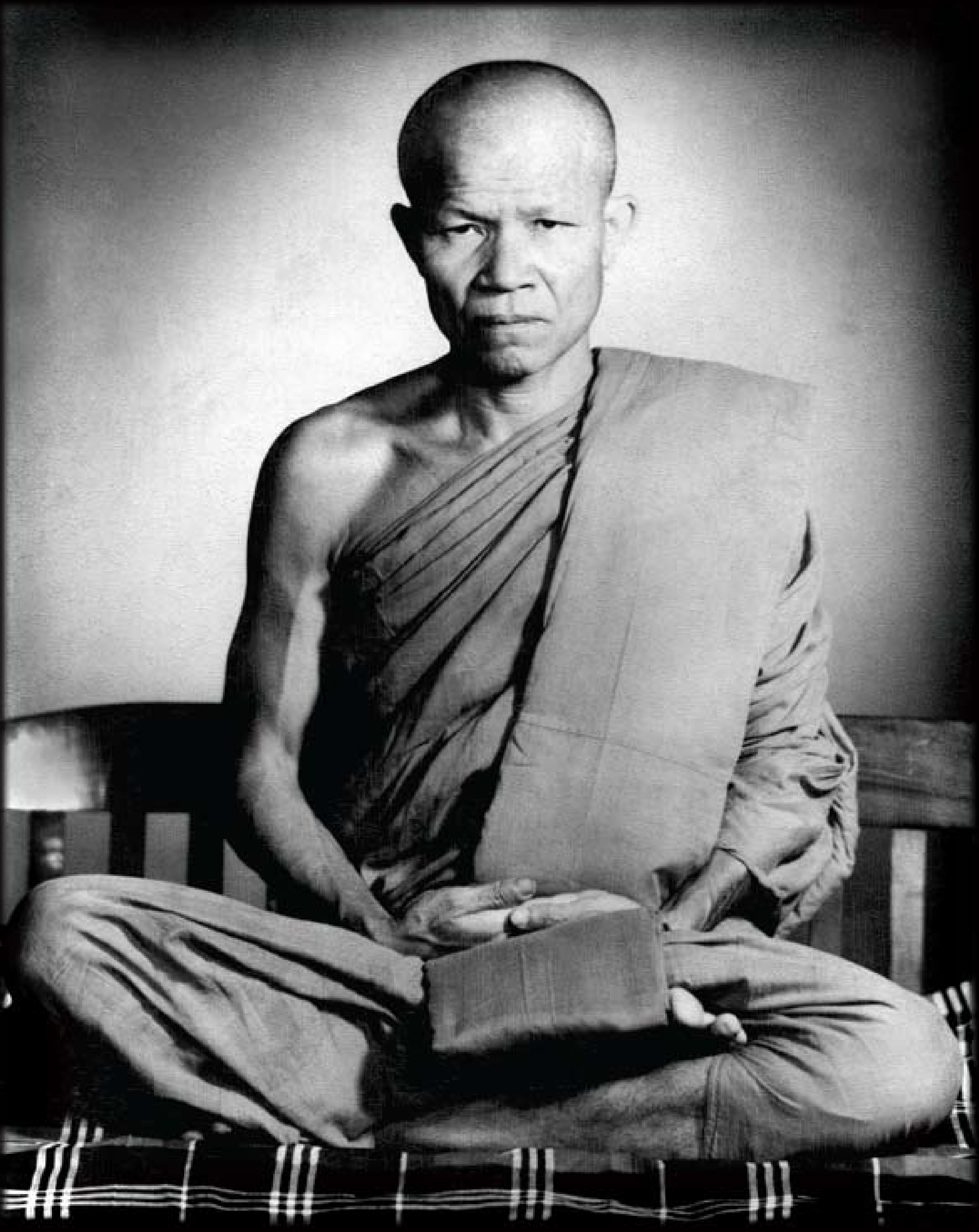
A Forest Dhamma Publication / March 2011

Cover and interior design by Mae Chee Melita Halim.

The translations in this book were compiled from the spoken discourses of Luangta Maha Boowa. For the most part, they have been adapted for this book from Ajaan Thanissaro's English translations published in the books *A Life of Inner Quality, Straight From the Heart* and *Things As They Are*.

ISBN 978-974-496-663-6
Printed in Thailand by:
Silpa Siam Packaging and Printing Co., Ltd.
silpa@ksc.th.com
Tel. (662) 444-3351-9

Published by:
Forest Dhamma Books
fdbooks@hotmail.com • fdbooks@gmail.com
www.ForestDhamma.org



Luangta Maha Boowa Nyanasampanno
(1913 - 2011)





Samaṇa
















Visions *of a* Samaṇa








My mother was a wonderfully patient and devoted woman. She told me that of all the 16 children she carried to birth, I was by far the most troublesome in the womb. I was either so still in her stomach that she thought I must have already died, or I was thrashing around so violently that she thought I must have been on the verge of death. The closer I came to birth, the worse those extremes became.

Just before I was born, my mother and my father each had an auspicious dream. My father dreamed that he had received a very sharp knife, pointed at the tip with an elephant tusk handle and encased in a silver sheath. My father felt very pleased.

My mother, on the other hand, dreamed that she had received a pair of gold earrings which were so lovely that she couldn't resist the temptation to put them on and admire herself in the mirror. The more she looked, the more they impressed her.

My grandfather interpreted these two dreams to mean that the course of my life would follow one of two extremes. If I chose the way of evil, I would be the most feared criminal of my time. My character would be so fearsome that I was bound to end up being a crime boss of unprecedented daring and ferocity who'd never allow himself to be captured alive and imprisoned, but would hide out in the jungle and fight the authorities to the death.

At the other extreme, if I chose the way of virtue, my goodness would be unequalled. I'd be bound to ordain as a Buddhist monk and become a field of merit for the world.

When I grew up I noticed that all the older boys were getting married, so I thought that's what I wanted too. One day, an old fortune teller came to visit the house of my friend. In the course of conversation, my friend blurted out that he wanted to ordain as a monk. The old man looked a bit annoyed and then asked to see the boy's hand.

"Let's take a look at the lines in your palm to see if you're really going to be a monk. Oh! Look at this! There's no way you'll ordain."

"But I really want to ordain!"

"No way! You'll get married first."

I suddenly got an itch to ask the old man about my fortune, since I was hoping to marry at that time. I had no intention to ordain. When I stuck my hand out, the old man grabbed it and exclaimed: "This is the guy that's going to ordain!"

"But I want to get married."

"No way! Your ordination line is full. Before long you'll be a monk."

My face went flush because I wasn't intending to be a monk at all. I wanted to have a wife.

It was strange really. After that, whenever I thought of marrying a girl, some obstacle would arise to prevent it. I even had a narrow escape after I ordained,

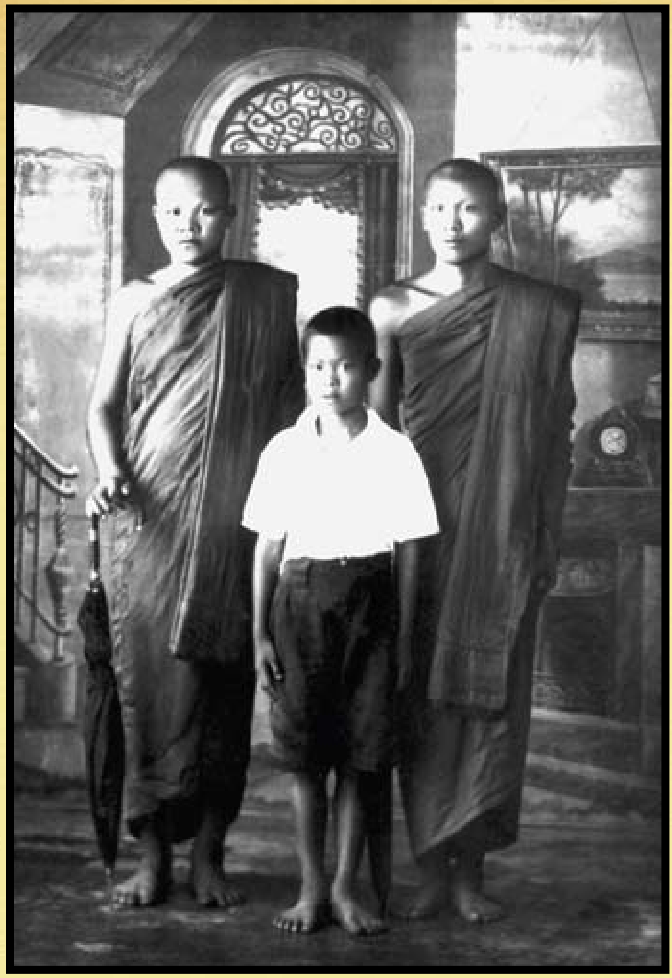




when a girl I previously had a crush on came looking for me at the monastery, only to find that I had just moved to another place. If she'd caught me in time, who knows…

While I was growing up, I had no particular desire to become a monk. It took me awhile to focus my attention on it. When I was 20 I fell seriously ill, so ill that my parents were constantly sitting at my bedside. My physical symptoms were severe. At the same time, a decision on whether or not to ordain weighed heavily on my mind. I felt the Lord of Death closing in on me. My whole life seemed to be in the balance.

My parents sat anxiously beside me not daring to speak. My mother, who was usually very talkative, just sat there crying. Eventually my father couldn't hold back his tears. They both thought I was going to die that night. Seeing my parents crying in despair, I made the solemn vow that should I recover from that illness, I would ordain as a Buddhist monk for their sake. As though in response to my intense resolve, my symptoms began to slowly fade away; by dawn they had disappeared completely. Instead of dying that night as expected, I made a full recovery.



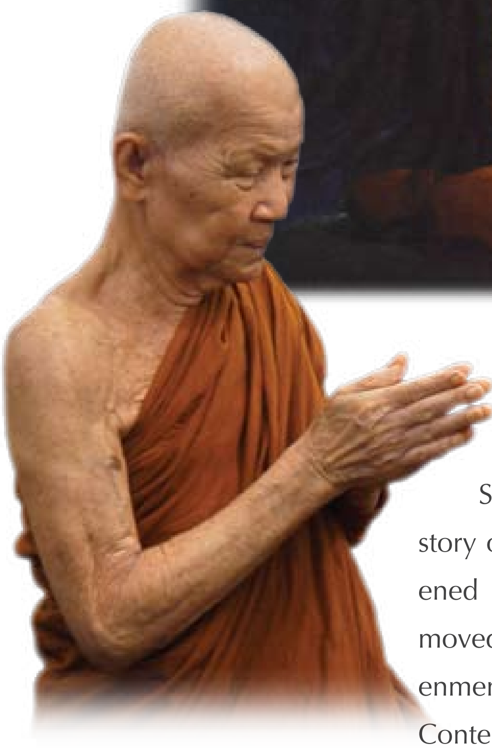


But following my recovery, the intensity of my resolve waned. My inner virtue kept reminding me that I had made a solemn promise to ordain, so why was I procrastinating? Several months of indecision passed, even though I kept acknowledging my failure to live up to my resolution. Why hadn't I ordained yet? I knew I had no choice but to ordain. I had to honor the agreement I made with the Lord of Death: my life in exchange for ordination. I willingly conceded that ordination was inevitable. I wasn't trying to avoid it, but I needed a catalyst. That catalyst came during a frank discussion with my mother. Both she and my father were pleading with me to ordain. Finally their tears forced me to make the decision that marked my path in life.



My father wanted me to ordain so badly that he began to cry. As soon as my father started crying, I was startled. My father's tears were no small matter. I reflected on my father's tears for three days before finalizing my decision. At the end of the third day, I approached my mother and announced my intention to ordain, adding the provision that I be allowed the freedom to give up the robes whenever I felt inclined. I made it clear that I wouldn't ordain if I was forbidden to disrobe. But my mother was too clever. She said that if I wanted to disrobe immediately after the ordination ceremony, in front of all the people in attendance, she wouldn't object. She'd be satisfied to see me standing there in yellow robes. That was all she asked. Of course, who would be foolish enough to immediately disrobe right there in front of the preceptor with the whole village in attendance? My mother easily outsmarted me on that one.





Soon after my ordination, I began reading the story of the Buddha's life, which immediately awakened a strong sense of faith in my heart. I was so moved by the Buddha's struggle to attain Enlightenment that tears rolled down my cheeks as I read. Contemplating the scope of his attainment instilled in me a fervent desire to gain release from suffering. Toward that purpose, I decided to formally study the Buddha's teachings as a preparation for putting them into practice. With that aim in mind, I made a solemn vow to complete the third grade of Pali studies. As soon as I passed the third-level Pali exams, I planned to follow the way of practice. I had no intention to study further or take exams for the higher levels.

When I traveled to Chiang Mai to take my exams, by chance Venerable Ajaan Mun arrived at Wat Chedi Luang in Chiang Mai at the time I did. As

soon as I learned that he was staying there, I was overwhelmed with joy. When I returned from my alms round next morning, I learned from another monk that Ajaan Mun left for alms on a certain path and returned by the very same path. This made me even more eager to see him. Even if I couldn't meet him face to face, I'd be content just to have a glimpse of him before he left.

The next morning, before Ajaan Mun went on his alms round, I hurried out early for alms and then returned to my quarters. From there, I kept watch on the path by which he would return, and before long I saw him coming. With a longing that came from having wanted to see him for such a long time, I peeked out from my hiding place to catch a glimpse of him. The moment I saw him, a feeling of complete faith arose within me. I felt that because I had now seen an Arahant, I hadn't wasted my birth as a human being. Although no one had told me that he was an Arahant, my heart became firmly convinced of it the moment I saw him. At the same time, a feeling of sudden elation hard to describe came over me, making my hair stand on end.

When I had passed my Pali exams, I returned to Bangkok with the intention of heading out to the countryside to practice meditation in line with my vow. But when I reached Bangkok, the senior monk who was my teacher insisted that I stay on. He was keenly interested to see me further my Pali studies. I tried to find some way to slip away, because I felt that the conditions of my vow had been met the moment I had passed my Pali exams. Under no circumstances would I study for or take the next level of Pali exams.

It's my temperament to value truthfulness. Once I've made a vow, I won't break it. Even life I don't value as much as a vow. So now I had to find some way to go out to practice. By a fortunate turn of events, that senior monk was suddenly invited out to the provinces, which gave me a chance to leave Bangkok while he was away. Had he been there, it would have been hard for me to get away, because I was indebted to him in many ways and probably would have felt such deference for him that I would have had difficulty leaving. But as soon as I saw my chance, I decided to make a vow that night, asking for an omen from the Dhamma to reinforce my determination to leave.

After finishing my chants, I made my vow: the gist of which was that if my going out to meditate in line with my earlier vow would go smoothly and fulfill my aspirations, I wanted an unusual vision to appear to me, either in my meditation or in a dream. But if I'd be denied the chance to practice, or if having gone out I'd meet with disappointment, I asked that the vision show the reason why I'd be disappointed. On the other hand, if my departure was to fulfill my aspirations, I asked that the vision be extraordinarily strange and amazing. With that, I sat down to meditate. When no visions appeared during the long period I sat meditating, I stopped to rest.

As soon as I fell asleep, however, I dreamed that I was floating effortlessly above a vast celestial metropolis. Stretching beneath me as far as the eye could see was an extremely impressive sight. All the houses looked like royal palaces, shining brightly as they glittered in the sunlight, as though made of solid gold. I floated three times around the metropolis and then returned to earth. As soon as I returned to earth, I woke up. It was four o'clock in the morning. I quickly got up with a feeling of fullness and contentment in my heart, because while I floated around the metropolis, my eyes were dazzled by many strange and amazing sights. I felt happy and very pleased with my vision. I thought that my hopes were sure to be fulfilled. I had never before seen such an amazing vision, and one that coincided so nicely with my vow. I really marveled at my vision that night. Early the next morning, I went to take leave of the senior monk in charge of the monastery, who willingly gave me permission to go.

From the very start of my practice, I was very earnest and committed – because that's the sort of person I am. I don't play around. When I take a stance, that's how it has to be. When I set out to practice, I had only one book – the Patimokkha – in my shoulder bag. Now, I'd strive for the full path and the full results. I planned to give it my all – to give it my life. I wasn't going to hope for anything short of freedom from suffering. I felt sure that I would attain that release in this lifetime. All I asked was that someone show me that the paths, the fruitions and Nibbana were still attainable. I would give my life to that person and to the Dhamma, without holding anything back. If it meant death, I'd die



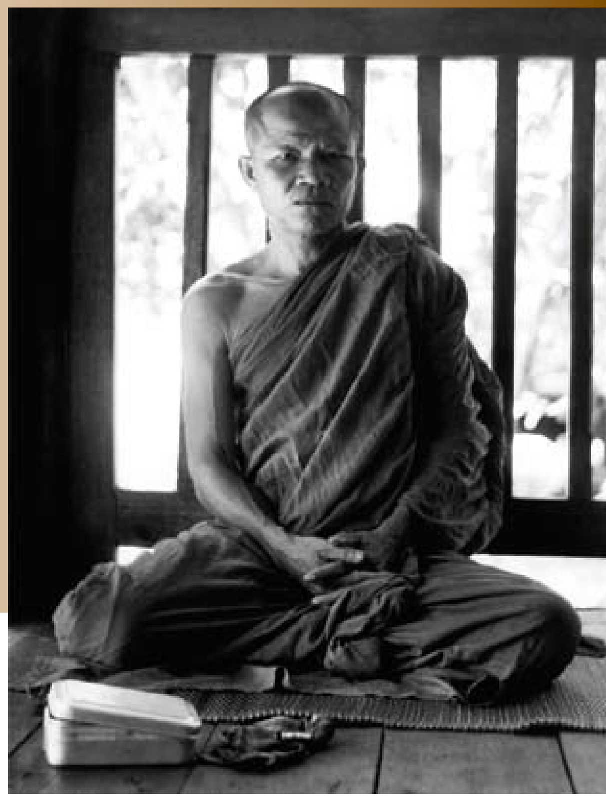
practicing meditation. I wouldn't die in ignoble retreat. My heart was set like a stone post.

I spent the next rains in Cakkaraad district of Nakhon Ratchasima province, because I hadn't been able to catch up with Ajaan Mun. As soon as I got there, I began accelerating my efforts, practicing both day and night; and it wasn't long before my heart attained the stillness of samadhi. I wasn't willing to do any other work aside from the work of sitting and walking meditation, so I pushed myself until my samadhi was really solid.

One day, just as my mind became calm and concentrated, a vision appeared in my meditation. I watched as a white-robed renunciant walked up and stood about 6 feet in front of me. He was an impressive looking man of about 50 who was impeccably dressed and had an unusually fair complexion. As I gazed at him, he looked down at his hands and started to count on his fingers. He counted one finger at a time until he reached nine, then glanced up at me and said, "In nine years you'll attain."

Later, I contemplated the meaning of this vision. The only attainment that I truly desired was freedom from suffering. By that time, I had been ordained for seven years, and it hardly seemed likely that two more years gave me enough time to succeed. Surely it couldn't be that easy. I decided to begin counting from the year I left to begin practicing. By that reckoning, I should attain my





goal in nine years' time, in my 16th rains retreat. If the vision was indeed prophetic, then that timeframe seemed quite reasonable.

When I finally reached Venerable Ajaan Mun, he taught me the Dhamma as if it came straight from his heart. He would never use the words, "It might be like that" or "It seems to be like this" because his knowledge came directly from personal experience. It was as though he kept saying, "Right here. Right here." Where were the paths, the fruitions and Nibbana? "Right here. Right here." My heart was convinced, really convinced. So I made a solemn vow: As long as he was still alive, I would not leave him as my teacher. No matter where I went, I'd have to return to him. With that determination, I accelerated my efforts in meditation.



Several nights later, I had another amazing vision. I dreamed that I was fully robed, carrying my bowl and umbrella-tent and following an overgrown trail through the jungle. Both sides of the trail were a mass of thorns and brambles. My only option was to continue following the trail, which was just barely a path, just enough to give a hint of where to go.

Shortly I reached a point where a thick clump of bamboo had fallen across the trail. I couldn't see which way to continue. There was no way around it on either side. How was I going to get past it? I peered here and there until I finally saw an opening, a tiny opening right along the path, just enough for me to squeeze my way through together with my bowl.

Since there was no other option, I removed my outer robe and folded it up neatly. I removed the bowl strap from my shoulder and crawled through the opening, dragging my bowl by its strap and pulling my umbrella-tent behind me. I was able to force my way through, dragging my bowl, my umbrella-tent and my robe behind me; but it was extremely difficult. I kept at it for a long time until I finally worked my way free. Then, I pulled my bowl until my bowl came through. I pulled my umbrella-tent and my robe, and they came through. As





soon as everything was safely through, I put on my robe again, slung my bowl over my shoulder and told myself, "Now I can continue."

I followed that overgrown trail for another 100 feet. Then, looking up, I suddenly saw nothing but wide-open space. In front of me appeared a great ocean. Looking across it, I saw no further shore. All I could see was the shore where I stood and a tiny island sitting way out in the distance, like a black speck on the edge of the horizon. I was determined to head for that island. As soon as I walked down to the water's edge, a boat came up to the shore and I got in. The boatman didn't speak to me at all. As soon as I got my bowl and other things in the boat and sat down, the boat sped out to the island, without my having to say a word. I don't know how it happened. It just sped out to the island. There didn't seem to be any disturbances or waves whatsoever. Gliding silently, we arrived in a flash – because, after all, it was a dream.

As soon as we reached the island, I got my things out of the boat and went ashore. The boat disappeared immediately, without my saying even a word to

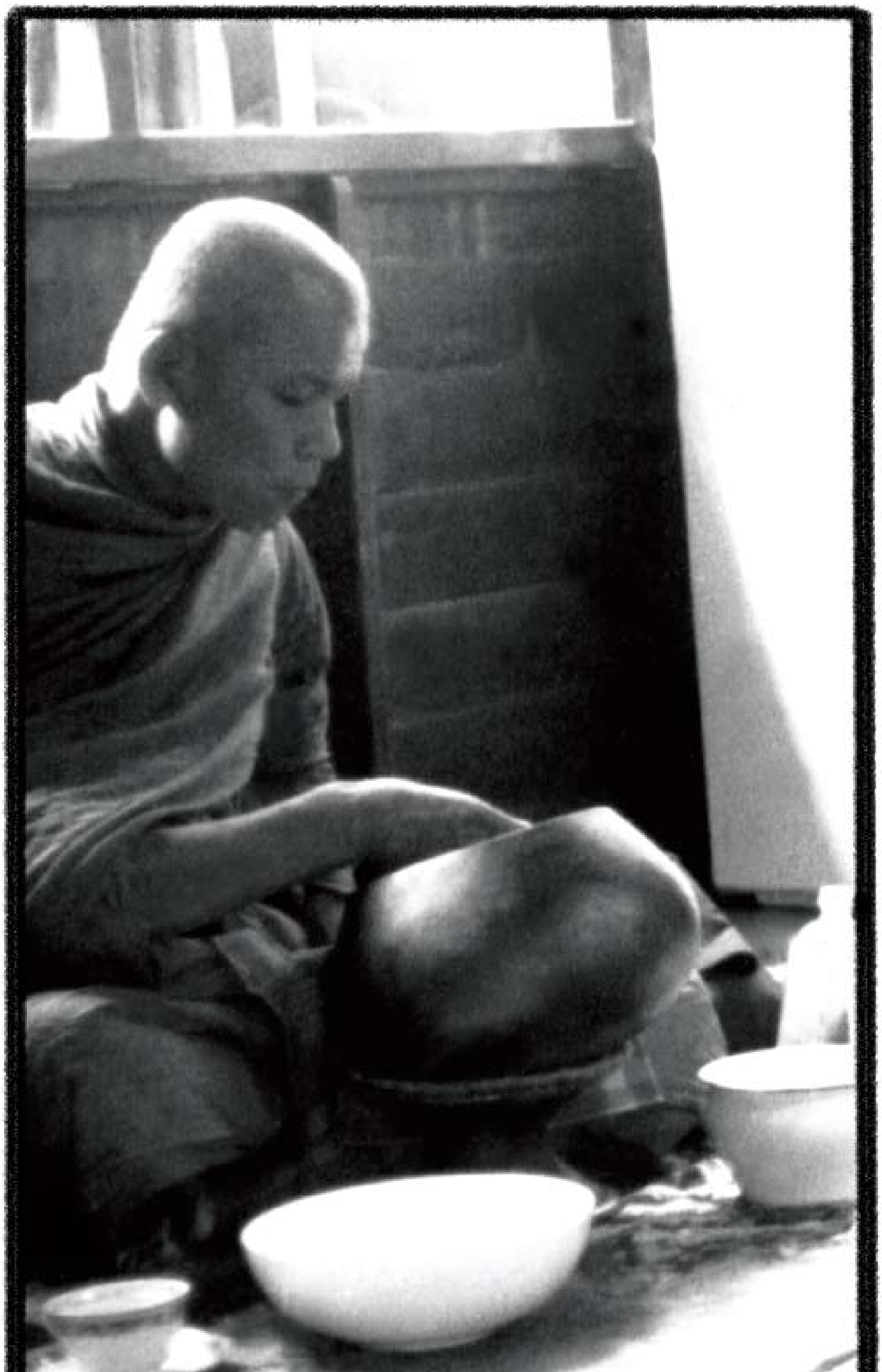


the boatman. I slung my bowl over my shoulder and climbed up the island. I kept climbing until I saw Ajaan Mun sitting on a small bench, pounding betel nut as he watched me climb towards him. "Maha," he said, "how did you get here? Since when has anyone come that way? How were you able to make it here?"

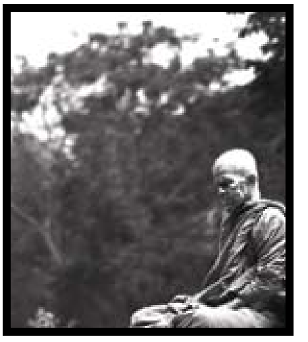
"I came by boat."

"Oho. That trail is really difficult. Nobody dares to risk his life coming that way. Very well then. Now that you're here, pound my betel for me." He handed me his betel pounder, and I pounded away – chock, chock, chock. After the second or third chock, I woke up. I felt somewhat disappointed. I wished I could have continued with the dream to at least see how it ended.

The next morning, I went to tell my vision to Ajaan Mun. He interpreted it very well. "This dream," he said, "is very auspicious. It shows a definite pattern for your practice. Follow the practice in the way that you've dreamed. In the beginning, it will be extremely difficult. You have to give it your best effort. Don't retreat. The beginning part where you made it through the clump of bamboo: that's the difficult part. The mind will make progress only to slip back,



over and over again. So give it your best. Don't ever retreat. Once you get past that, it's all wide open. You'll get to the island of safety without any trouble. That's not the hard part. The hard part is here at the beginning."



Taking his words to heart, I focused on my meditation with renewed diligence. My samadhi had been erratic for over a year by that time, so my meditation practice was constantly up and down. Again and again, it advanced to full strength only to deteriorate as before. It wasn't until April that I found a new approach, focusing on my meditation theme in a new way that made my concentration really solid. From that point on, I was able to sit in meditation all night long. My mind was able to settle down fully, which allowed me to continue accelerating my efforts. Speaking of the difficulties in the beginning stages of practice that my vision had predicted: that constant struggle to bring the mind under control was the most difficult part for me.

One day – during a time when I was extremely wary of Ajaan Mun – I lay down in the middle of the day and dozed off. As I slept, Ajaan Mun appeared in a dream to scold me: "Why are you sleeping like a pig? This is no pig farm! I won't tolerate monks coming here to learn the art of being a pig. You'll turn this place into a pigsty!" His voice bellowed, fierce and menacing, frightening me and causing me to wake with a start. Dazed and trembling, I stuck my head out the door expecting to see him. I was generally very frightened of him anyway; but I had forced myself to stay with him despite that. The reason was simple: it was the right thing to do. Besides, he had an effective antidote for pigs like me. In a panic, I looked around in all directions, but I didn't see him anywhere. Only then did I begin to breathe a bit easier.

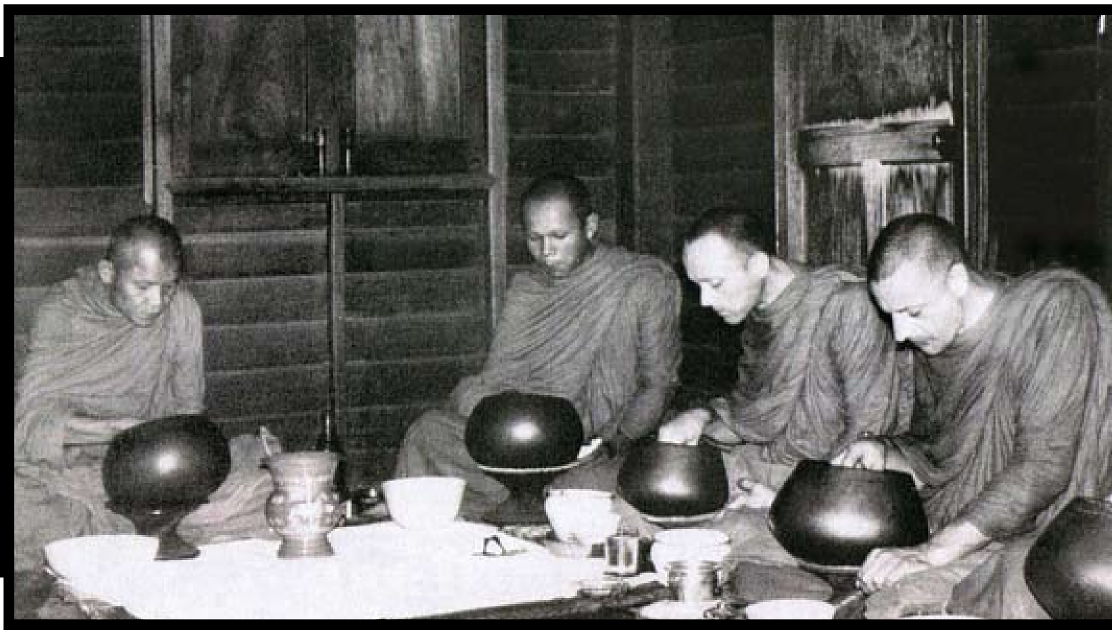
Later when I had a chance, I told Ajaan Mun what happened. He very cleverly explained my dream in a way that relieved my discomfort, "You've just recently come to live with a teacher, and you are really determined to do well. Your dream simply mirrored your state of mind. That scolding you heard,



reproaching you for acting like a pig, was the Dhamma warning you not to bring pig-like tendencies into the monkhood and the religion."

Following that, I took every opportunity to be more diligent. Since my arrival, I had heard Ajaan Mun talk a lot about the ascetic practices – such as the practice of accepting only the food received on one's alms round. He himself was very strict in observing these practices. So I vowed to take on special ascetic practices during the rains retreat, which I diligently maintained. I vowed to eat only the food I got while on my alms round. If anyone tried to put food in my bowl aside from the food I had received on my round, I wouldn't accept it and wouldn't be interested in it. I was unwilling to compromise my principles, which is why I wouldn't let anyone ruin my ascetic practice by putting food in my bowl – with the exception of Ajaan Mun, who I respected with all my heart. With him, I'd give in and let him put food in my bowl when he saw fit.

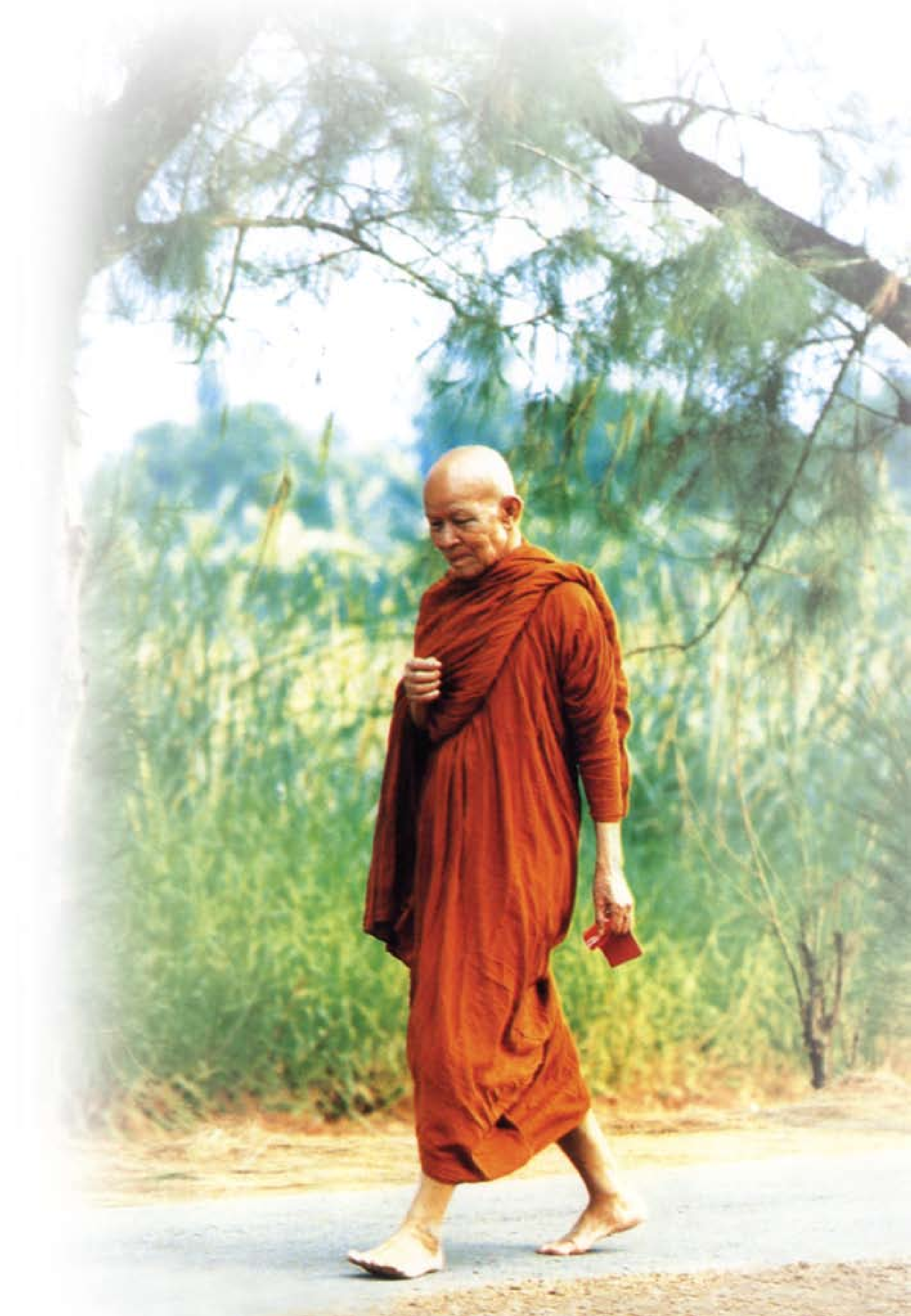
Coming back from my alms round, I'd quickly put my bowl in order, taking just the small amount of food I planned to eat – because during the rains



I never ate my fill. I determined to take only about 60 to 70 percent of what would make me full. So I cut back my food consumption about 30 to 40 percent. It wasn't convenient to go without food altogether, since I always had duties involved with the group. I myself was like one of the senior monks in the group, in a behind-the-scenes sort of way; though I never let on. I was involved in looking after peace and order within the monastic community. I didn't have much seniority – just over ten rains – but Ajaan Mun was kind enough to trust me in helping him look after the monks and novices.

When I had put my bowl in order, I set it out of the way behind my seat, right against the wall next to a post. I put the lid on and covered it with a cloth to make doubly sure that no one would put any food in it. But when Ajaan Mun put food in my bowl, he had a clever way of doing it. After I gave him the food that I prepared for him and had returned to my place; after we had chanted our blessing and during the period of silence when we contemplated our food – that's when he'd do it: right when we were about to eat.

At that time, I was absolutely determined to not let this observance be deficient. I wanted my practice to be complete, both in the letter of its strict observance and in the spirit of my determination to stick to it. But because of my love and respect for Ajaan Mun, I accepted his gifts even though I did not feel



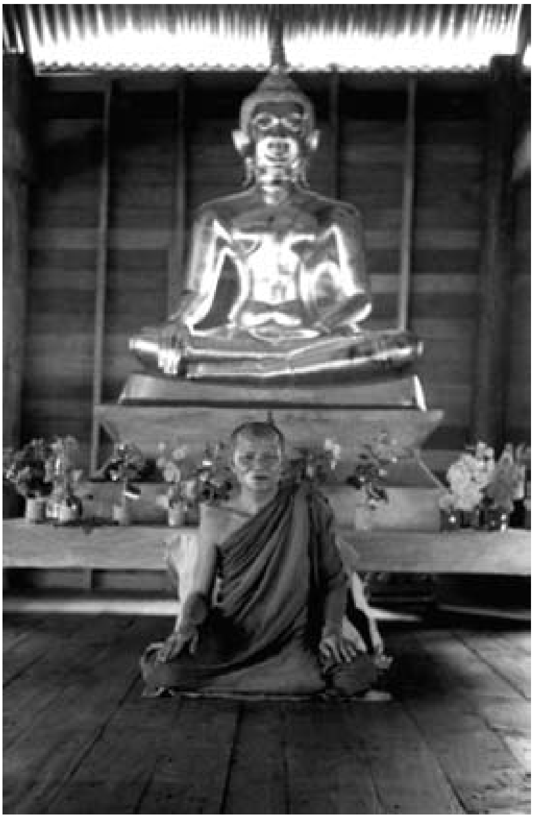
comfortable about it. But he probably saw that there was pride lurking in my vow to observe this practice, so he helped bend it a little to give me something to contemplate, thus dissuading me from being too rigid in my views. Therein lies the difference between a principle in the practice and a principle in the heart. I was right in my earnestness to follow a strict practice; but at the same time, I was wrong in terms of the levels of Dhamma that are higher and more subtle than that.

Comparing myself with Venerable Ajaan Mun, I could see that we were very different. When Ajaan Mun looked at something, he comprehended it thoroughly and in a way that was just right from every angle in the heart. He never focused on only one side, but always used wisdom to see the broader picture. This lesson I learned many times while living with him.

In that way, studying with Ajaan Mun wasn't simply a matter of studying teachings about the Dhamma. I had to adapt myself to the practices he followed until they were firmly impressed in my own thoughts, words and deeds. Living with him for a long time allowed me to gradually observe his habits and his practices, and to understand the reasoning behind them, until that knowledge was firmly embedded in my heart. I felt a great sense of security while living with him, because he himself was all Dhamma. At the same time, staying in his presence forced me to always be watchful and restrained.

Ajaan Mun had a habit of chanting every night for several hours. Hearing him softly chanting in his hut one evening, I had the mischievous urge to sneak up and listen. I wanted to find out what he chanted at such length every night. But as soon as I crept up close enough to hear him clearly, his voice stopped and remained silent. This didn't look good, so I quickly backed away and stood listening from a distance. No sooner had I backed away than I heard the low cadence of his chanting start up again, now too faint to be heard clearly. So again I sneaked forward – and again he went silent. In the end, I never did find out what he was chanting. I was afraid that if I stubbornly insisted on eavesdropping, a bolt of lightning might strike and a sharp rebuke thunder out.





Meeting him the next morning, I glanced away. I did not dare look him in the face. But he looked directly at me with a sharp, menacing glare. I learned my lesson the hard way: never again did I dare to sneak up and try to listen in on his chanting. I was afraid I would receive something severe for my trouble.

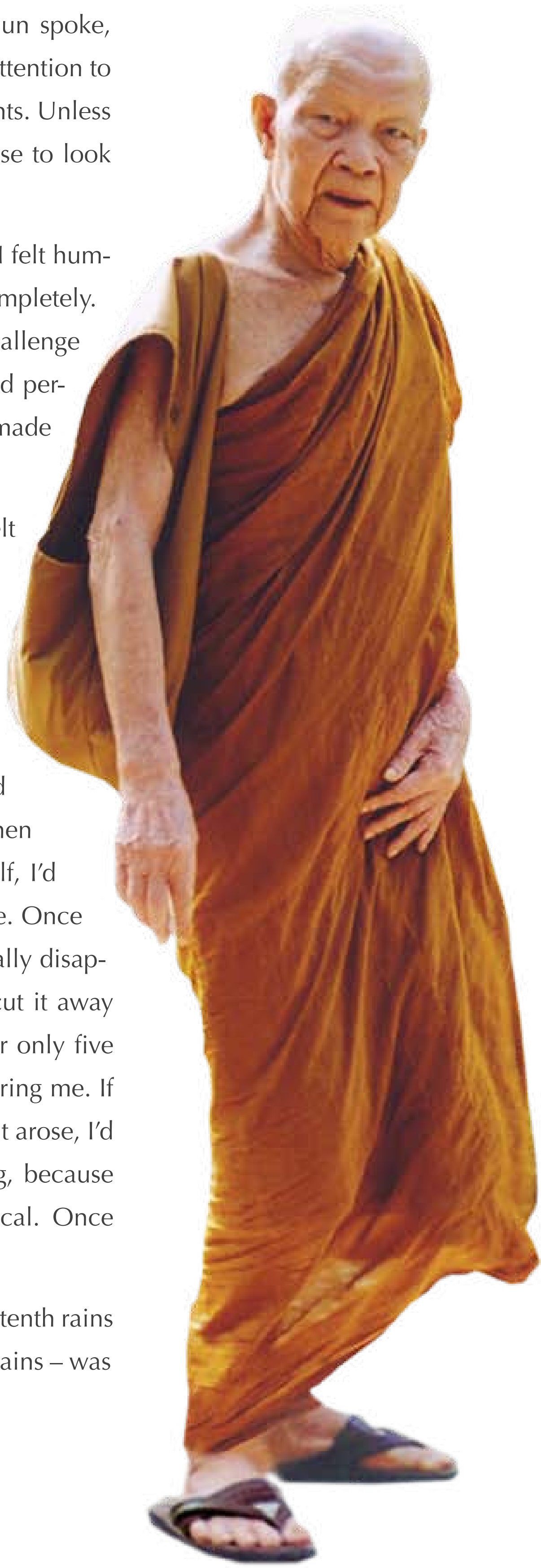
I had heard that Ajaan Mun could read other people's minds, and this intrigued me. So one day I decided to test him to see if it was true. In the afternoon, I prostrated three times before the Buddha statue and set up a determination in my heart: should Ajaan Mun know what I am thinking at this moment, then let me receive a clear and unmistakable sign that will dispel all my doubts.

Later that afternoon, I went to Ajaan Mun's hut to pay my respects. When I arrived, he was sewing patches on his robes, so I offered to help. As soon as I approached him, his expression changed and his eyes grew fierce. Something didn't feel right. I tentatively put my hand out to take a piece of cloth, but he quickly snatched it from my grasp with a short grunt of displeasure. "Don't be a nuisance!" Things didn't look good at all, so I sat quietly and waited. After

a few minutes of tense silence, Ajaan Mun spoke, "Normally a practicing monk has to pay attention to his own mind and observe his own thoughts. Unless he's crazy, he doesn't expect someone else to look into his mind for him."

In the lengthy silence that followed, I felt humbled and my mind surrendered to him completely. I made a solemn vow never again to challenge Ajaan Mun. After that, I respectfully asked permission to help him sew his robe, and he made no objection.

When staying with Ajaan Mun, I felt as though the paths, the fruitions and Nibbana were nearly within my grasp. Everything I did felt solid and brought good results. But when I left him to go wandering in the forest alone, all that changed. Because my mind still lacked a firm basis, doubts began to arise. When doubts arose that I couldn't handle myself, I'd have to go running back to him for advice. Once he suggested a solution, the problem usually disappeared in an instant, as though he had cut it away for me. Sometimes, I would leave him for only five or six days when a problem started bothering me. If I couldn't solve the problem the moment it arose, I'd head right back to him the next morning, because some of those problems were very critical. Once they arose, I needed advice in a hurry.



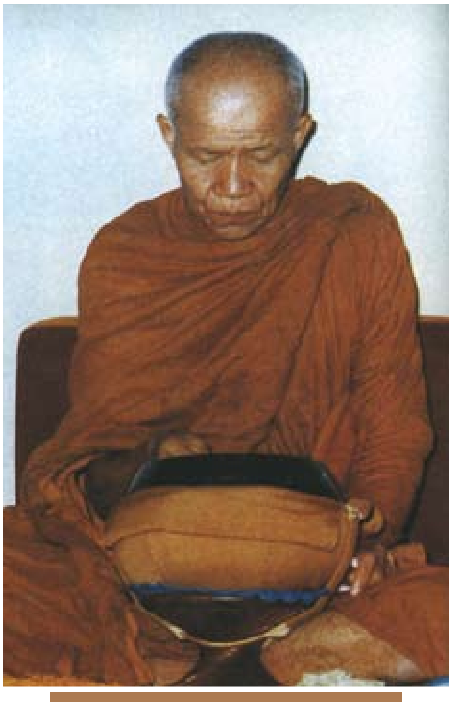
Speaking of effort in the practice, my tenth rains – beginning from the April after my ninth rains – was



when I made the most intense effort. In all my life, I have never made a more vigorous effort than I did during my tenth rains. The mind went all out, and so did the body. From that point on, I continued making progress until the mind became solid as a rock. In other words, I was so skilled in my samadhi that the mind was as unshakeable a slab of rock. Soon I became addicted to the total peace and tranquility of that samadhi state; so much so that my meditation practice remained stuck at that level of samadhi for five full years.

Once I was able to get past my addiction to samadhi, thanks to the hard-hitting Dhamma of Ajaan Mun, I set out to investigate. When I began investigating with wisdom, progress came quickly and easily because my samadhi was fully prepared. The path forward was wide-open and spacious, just as my vision had prophesied.

By the time I reached my 16th rains retreat, my meditation was progressing to the point where mindfulness and wisdom were circling around all external sensations and all internal thought processes, meticulously investigating every-

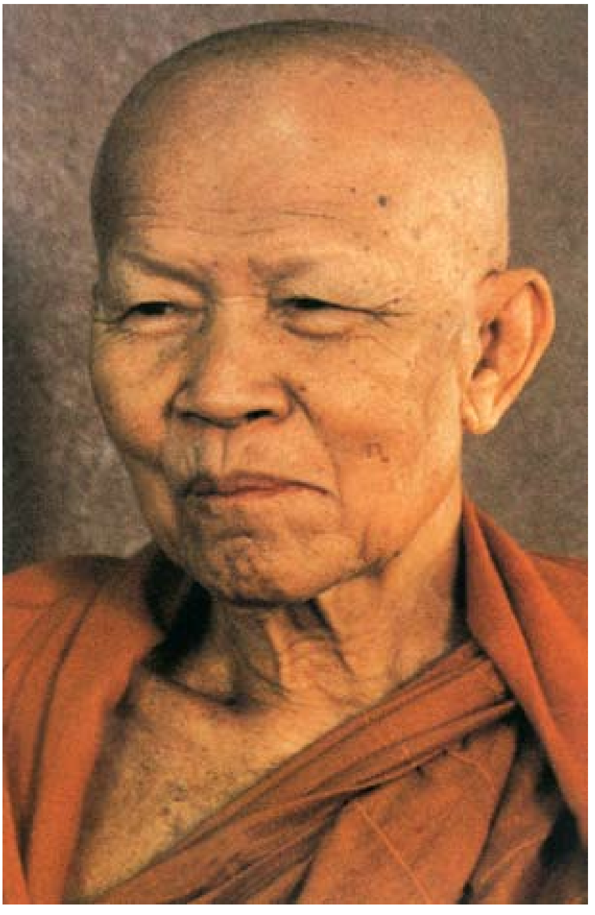




thing without leaving any aspect unexplored. At that level of practice, mindfulness and wisdom acted in unison like a Wheel of Dhamma, revolving in continuous motion within the mind. I began to sense that the attainment of my goal was close at hand. I remembered my earlier vision predicting attainment in that year and accelerated my efforts.

But by the end of the retreat, I still had not attained. My visions had always prophesied accurately before, but I began to suspect that this one had lied to me. Being somewhat frustrated, I decided to ask a fellow monk who I trusted what he made of the discrepancy. He immediately retorted that I must calculate a full year: from the beginning of the 16th rains retreat to the beginning of the 17th. Doing that gave me 9 more months of my 16th year. I was elated by his explanation and got back to work in earnest.

Having been gravely ill for many months, Ajaan Mun passed away shortly after my 16th rains retreat. Ajaan Mun was always close at hand and ready to help resolve my doubts and provide me with inspiration. When I approached him with meditation problems that I was unable to solve on my own, those issues invariably dissolved away the moment he offered a solution. The loss of Ajaan Mun as a guide and mentor profoundly affected my hopes for attainment. Gone were the easy solutions I had

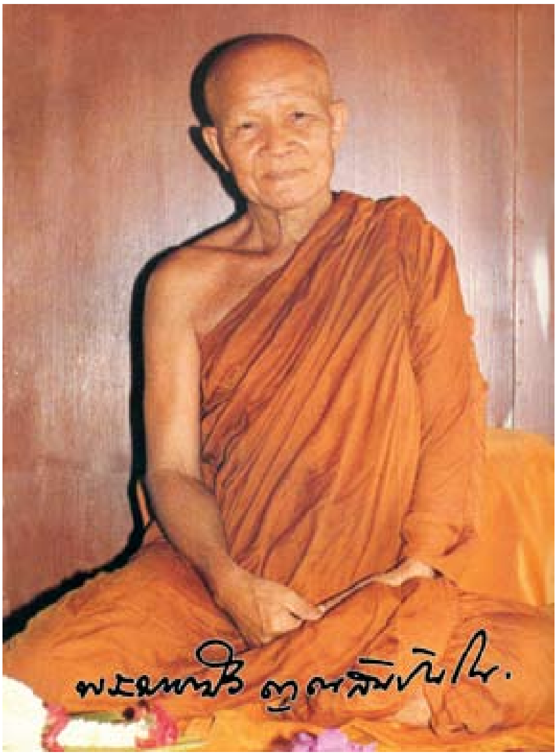




found while living with him. I could think of no other person capable of helping me solve my problems in meditation. I was now completely on my own.

Fortunately, the current of Dhamma that flowed through my meditation had reached an irreversible stage. By May of the next year, my meditation had arrived at a critical phase. When the decisive moment arrived, affairs of time and place ceased to be relevant. All that appeared in the mind was a splendid, natural radiance. I had reached a point where nothing else was left for me to investigate. I had already let go of everything – only that radiance remained. Except for the central point of the mind's radiance, the whole universe had been conclusively let go.

At that time, I was examining the mind's central point of focus. All other matters had been examined and discarded; there remained only that one point of "knowingness". It became obvious that both satisfaction and dissatisfaction

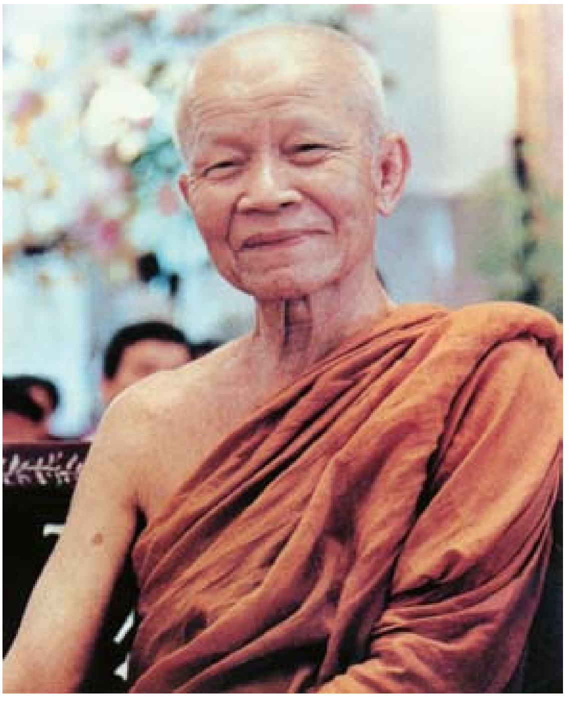




issued from that source. Brightness and dullness – those differences arose from the same origin.

Then, in one spontaneous instant, Dhamma answered the question. The Dhamma arose suddenly and unexpectedly, as though it were a voice in the heart: "Whether it is dullness or brightness, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, all such dualities are not-self." The meaning was clear: Let everything go. All of them are not-self.

Suddenly, the mind became absolutely still. Having concluded unequivocally that everything without exception is not-self, it had no room to maneuver. The mind came to rest – impassive and still. It had no interest in self or not-self, no interest in satisfaction or dissatisfaction, brightness or dullness. The mind resided at the center, neutral and placid. It appeared inattentive; but, in truth,





it was fully aware. The mind was simply suspended in a still, quiescent condition.

Then, from that neutral, impassive state of mind, the nucleus of existence – the core of the knower – suddenly separated and fell away. Having finally been stripped of all self-identity, brightness and dullness and everything else were suddenly torn asunder and destroyed once and for all.

In the moment when the mind's fundamental delusion flipped over and fell away, the sky appeared to come crashing down as the entire universe trembled and quaked. When all delusion separated and vanished from the mind, it seemed as if the entire world had fallen away and vanished along with it. Earth, sky – all collapsed in an instant.

On May 15th of that year, the 9-year prediction from my earlier vision was fully realized. I finally reached the island of safety in the middle of the great wide ocean.



Several years later, while I was staying at Baan Huay Sai, I experienced another amazing vision. Floating high up in the sky, I saw all the Buddhas from the past stretched out before me. As I prostrated before them, all the Buddhas were transformed into life-size solid gold statues. Pouring fragrant water, I performed a ritual bathing of all the golden Buddhas.

While floating back to the ground, I saw an enormous crowd of people stretching to the horizon in every direction. At that moment, precious holy water began streaming from my finger tips and from the palms of my hands, spraying out in all directions until it had showered the entire congregation.

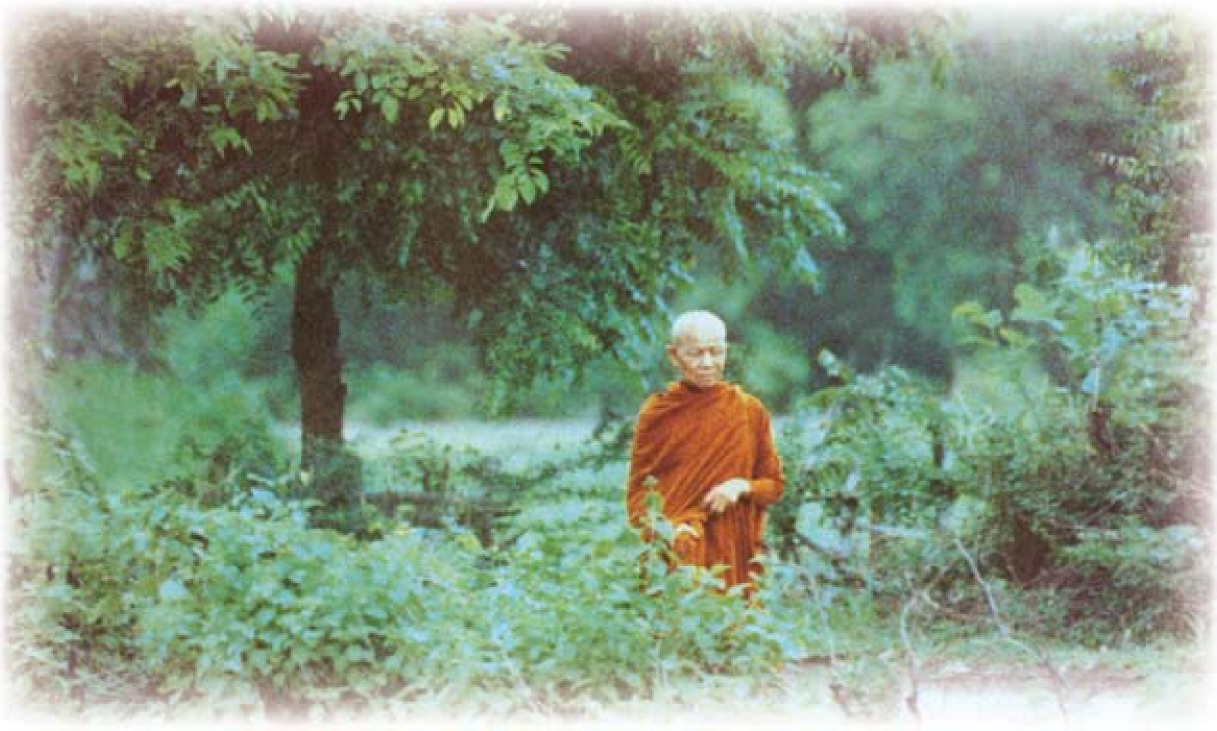
As I floated above the ground, I looked down and saw my mother sitting in the crowd. Looking up, she implored of me, "Son, are you going to leave? Are you leaving?" I answered, "When I finish I'm going to leave, but you wait here."



When I had finished spraying holy water in all directions, I floated down to the ground. My mother had spread a mat on the ground in front of her house, so I sat down and taught her the Dhamma.

Reflecting on this vision later, I realized that I would have to ordain my 60-year-old mother as a white-robed nun. I wished to give her the best possible opportunity for spiritual development during her remaining years. So I quickly sent her a letter advising that she begin preparing for a nun's ordination.

My place of birth was located in Udon Thani province, several hundred miles from Baan Huay Sai. Upon arriving at Baan Taad village, I found my mother eagerly anticipating her new life. Straightaway we set about preparing for her ordination. Recognizing that my mother was too old to wander with me through the forests, I looked for a suitable place in the vicinity of Baan Taad village to establish a forest monastery. When a maternal uncle and his friends offered a 70-acre piece of forested land about one mile south of the village, I gratefully accepted. I decided to settle there and build a monastery where both monks and nuns could live in peaceful seclusion. I instructed my supporters to build a simple grass-roofed, bamboo meeting hall and small bamboo huts for the monks and nuns.



The vision I had of teaching my mother foreshadowed the establishment of Baan Taad Forest Monastery, which completely changed my life forever. Before that, I roamed as I pleased. At the end of each rains retreat, I'd just disappear into the forest, content like a bird that has only its wings and its tail to look after. After that, I lived at my monastery and looked after my mother until the day she died.

Eventually, monks began to gather around me in larger and larger numbers, and I taught them to be resolute in their practice and to maintain Ajaan Mun's lineage of renunciation, strict discipline and intensive meditation. Although I have a reputation for being fierce and uncompromising, more and more practicing monks have gravitated to Baan Taad Forest Monastery over the years, transforming it into a thriving center of Buddhist practice.

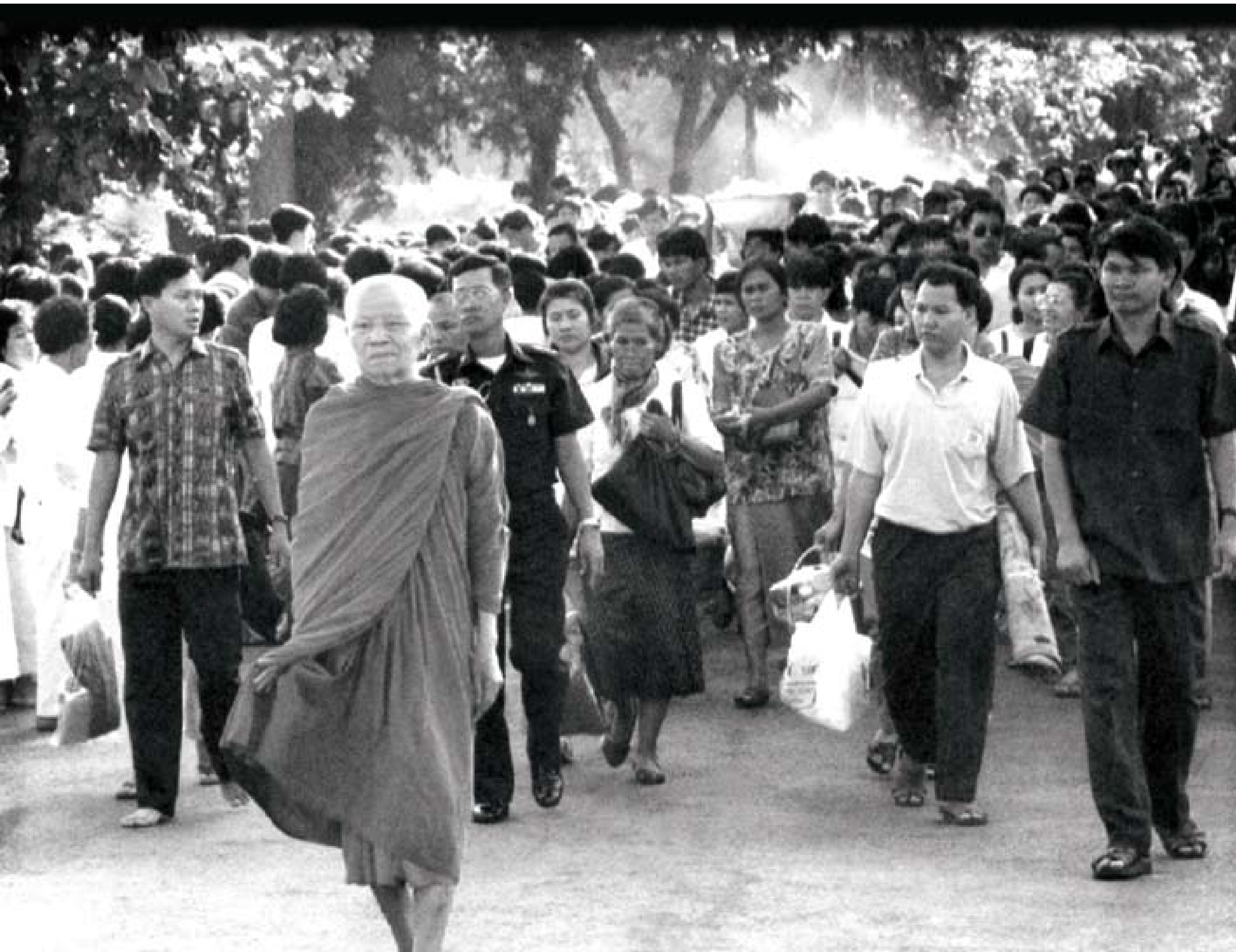
The enormous crowd of people in my vision began to become a reality. Gradually, little by little, my teaching began to spread, until it extended far and wide. Now, people from across Thailand and around the world come to listen to Luangta Maha Boowa expound the Dhamma. Some travel here to hear me

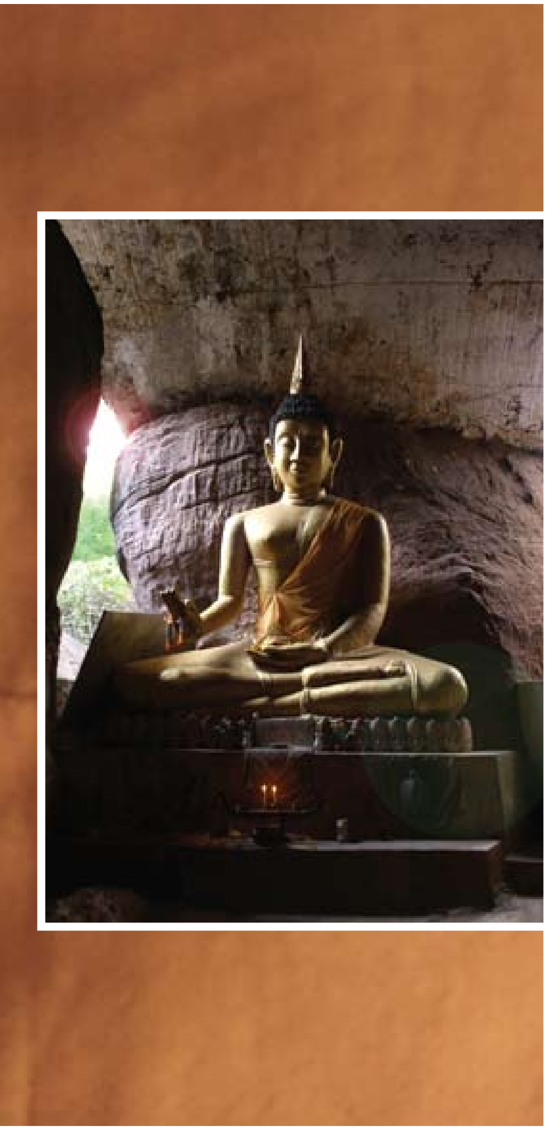
talk in person; some listen to recordings of my talks that are broadcast throughout Thailand on the radio and the Internet.

As I grew older, my exposure in Thai public life continued to expand with each passing year. When the economic crisis hit in 1997, I stepped in to help lift the nation from the depths of darkness: that is, from greediness on one level of society and from poverty on the other. I wanted Thais to focus on the causes of the crisis so that, by knowing the causes, they could change their behavior to prevent such an event from recurring. So I used the Help the Nation campaign not only to raise gold for the national treasury, but more importantly as a means to spread the Buddha's teaching to a broader section of Thai society in an age when many Thai people are losing touch with Buddhist principles.

I have tried my utmost to help society. Within my heart, I have no sense of courage and no sense of fear; no such things as gain or loss, victory or defeat. My attempts to assist people stem entirely from loving compassion. I sacrificed everything to attain the Supreme Dhamma that I now teach. I nearly lost my life in search of Dhamma, crossing the threshold of death before I could proclaim to the world the Dhamma that I realized. Sometimes I talk boldly, as if I were a conquering hero. But the Supreme Dhamma in my heart is neither bold nor fearful. It has neither gain nor loss, neither victory nor defeat. Consequently, my teaching emanates from the purest form of compassion.

I can assure you that the Dhamma I teach does not deviate from those principles of truth that I myself have realized. The Lord Buddha taught the same message that I am conveying to you. Although I am in no way comparable to the Buddha, the confirmation of that realization is right here in my heart. All that I have fully realized within myself concurs with everything that the Lord Buddha taught. Nothing that I have realized contradicts the Lord Buddha in any way. The teaching that I present is based on principles of truth which I have long since wholeheartedly accepted. That's why I teach people with such vigor as I spread my message throughout the world.







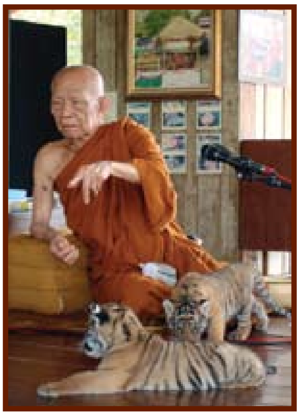




Human Values *and* Human Worth





Dhamma is something very profound. If the world did not have Dhamma as water to put out its fires, it would be a very difficult place – an impossible place – to live. Dhamma is something that the heart can hold to, something that nourishes the heart, enabling people to be good and to find peace. The religion, the aspect of Dhamma we can describe to one another, is simply the good and right teaching of the Buddha, which can guide societies and nations as well as individuals, like our families and ourselves. It's unequalled in producing good and noble qualities in the hearts of people everywhere. Any home, any family, any individual without the religion, without moral virtue to protect and train the heart, is sure to be constantly troubled and restless, lacking any sense of well-being and equilibrium. Quarrels tend to flare up in families like this and then spread out into society – to the neighborhood and the workplace. Our inability to get along with one another comes, for the most part, from going against the principles of morality, which are correct, noble and good.

In particular, when a husband and wife have trouble getting along with each other, it's because one or the other has gone beyond the bounds of two principles taught by the Buddha: contentment with one's possessions while not infringing on those of others, and fewness of wants. In other words, if you have one spouse, don't try to have two, because once you have two, they're bound to become archrivals.

What sort of "fewness of wants" do we mean here? I remember several years back, on the front pages of the newspapers – and it was really disturbing to see – a top government official made an announcement telling monks that the two principles of contentment and fewness of wants shouldn't be taught to people because both of these principles were acting as a deadweight on the nation's economy, which the government was trying to develop at the time. According to him, these two principles were at odds with economic prosperity. This was many years back, but I haven't forgotten it – because it was something disturbing that was hard to forget. Actually, these two principles don't mean

at all what he thought they did. They're principles that people in general, lay as well as ordained, should put into practice in line with their position in life. There's no word, no phrase of the Dhamma at odds with the progress of the world. In fact, the Dhamma gives the world nothing but support and protection.

For a monk – a son of the Buddha – these two principles mean that he shouldn't be greedy for the four necessities of life: 1) Clothing, which comes from the generosity of lay people; 2) Food. No matter what kind of food it is, a monk can't acquire it on his own. He has to depend on others to look after his needs in this area, from the day of his ordination to his last day as a monk; 3) Shelter; and 4) Medicine.

All of these requisites are provided in good faith by people in general. A monk shouldn't be greedy for them, because that would go against the basic principles of the Dhamma taught by the Buddha. A monk should be modest in his needs. This is the proper way for him to act – in keeping with the fact that he depends on other people to look after his needs – so that he won't be too great a burden on people of good faith. A monk shouldn't clutter his mind with concern for material necessities, which are simply means to keep the body going so that he can comfortably perform his duties as a contemplative.

As for lay people, the principle of fewness of wants means being content with one's family life. One husband should have one wife. One wife should have one husband. One husband should have only one wife – not two or three, which would act like a fire spreading to consume himself and his family. This is what it means to have fewness of wants – not being greedy for thrills that would stoke fire in the home and not dabbling in the many desires that added together wage war with one another.

A husband and wife should be honest with each other. Loyal and committed. Faithful to each other at all times and in all places, they should keep no secrets from each other but be open and above-board with pure and loyal hearts. If one of them has to work outside the home or be away for the night, he or

she should go with a clean heart and clean hands, and come back without the blemish of any stains. If one of them has to go away on business, no matter how far, it should be done in such a way that the one at home needn't worry or be troubled that the one going away is doing anything wrong and neglecting the principle of fewness of wants by sleeping with someone outside the legitimate account. Worries like these are worse than a hundred spirits returning from the dead to grab a person's entrails and squeeze them to bits. If a husband or wife must go away for a long time, it should be for reasons that aim at maintaining the family in happiness and joy.

When a husband and wife are faithful to each other in this way, then no matter where they go, neither suffers from worry or distrust. They live together smoothly and happily to the end of their lives because their hearts are honest and loyal to each other. Even if there are times when they have barely enough to scrape by, that isn't important. The important point lies in their being honest, faithful and committed to each other. Such a family may be rich or poor, but the happiness, security and trust its members feel for one another give them the stability and cohesion that everyone hopes for. This is called fewness of wants in a marriage relationship. One husband. One wife. No outside involvements. Even though other men and women fill the world, they don't become involved. This is fewness of wants for lay people.

If this principle of fewness of wants were to be erased from the world, human beings would know no bounds, and we wouldn't be any different from dogs in heat. Have you ever seen them? Here in the northeast of Thailand, they get going in August and September, barking and howling like crazy. There's no telling which one is which one's husband and which one is which one's wife. They bite one another to shreds. Have you ever seen them, every August and September? When they really get going they run all over the place with no sense of day or night, home or away, no concern for whether or not they get fed. They go after each other worse than when they're rabid. If we human beings were to let ourselves run loose like that, we'd cause even worse damage than they do because we have guns and weapons to shoot and kill one another, thanks to the

fact that we're smarter than they are. The world would be a shambles, and there wouldn't be enough room for us all in the prisons. This is the harm that comes from letting oneself go under the unruly power of sexual lust. There'd be no such word as "enough", and certainly dogs in heat would be no match for us.

Dogs have no limits when lust takes over. They can go anywhere with no fear of death, no concern for hunger or thirst. They run wild, without a thought for their owners. At most, they may stop by their homes for a moment. If anyone feeds them in time, they eat. If not, they're off and running. And look at them. What do they look like at times like this? Ears torn, mouths torn, legs torn, stomachs ripped open in some cases, all from the fights they get into. Some of them die, some of them go crazy, some of them never return home.

This is the sort of harm that occurs when animals fall under the power of lust. Because it's so different from their normal nature, when they behave like that, it's not pretty to look at. When the season comes, males and females go running wild after one another. The fires of lust and anger burn together and consume everything. This is what happens when animals know no bounds; that is, when their lust knows no limits. They suffer so much pain, so much distress when the disease of lust flares up – to the extent that some of them die or are crippled for life.

If we human beings didn't have the Dhamma of fewness of wants as a brake to safeguard our own safety, we'd know no limits in following our instincts either. Because of our intelligence, we'd cause much more harm and destruction to one another than animals do. When we're intelligent in the right way, it's an honor and a benefit to ourselves, our family and nation. But human intelligence is something that lends itself to all sorts of uses; and for the most part, if our minds are low, it becomes a tool for doing a great deal of evil. It's because of our intelligence that we human beings can do one another so much harm.

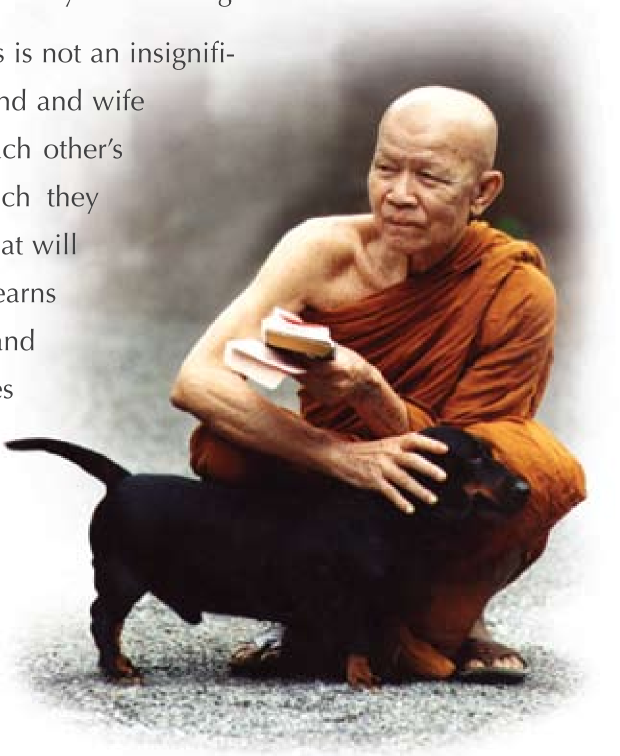
This is why we need moral virtue as a guide and protection, so that we can live together happily and in peace. Between husbands and wives, this means

being faithful to each other. Don't go looking for scraps and leftovers like our friends in August and September. That's not a course of action that human beings – who know enough to have a sense of right and wrong, good and bad – should put into practice. Otherwise we'll destroy, or at the very least reduce, the honor of our human status. Worse than that, we'll ruin ourselves to the point of having absolutely no worth.

To give in to the moods of our inner fires, looking for scraps and leftovers in bars, night clubs, massage parlors and other places catering to this sort of thing, is to destroy our inner virtue as human beings, because it's nothing more than the way of animals who know no bounds of propriety but know only how to get carried away with their passion and bite one another to shreds. For this reason, it's not a course we human beings should follow – and especially when we're married – because it contradicts the family bounds we've established in line with the universally recognized moral principles of human beings.

To act without restraint in this way would do such damage to a spouse's heart that no treatment could cure the sorrow and bring the heart back to normal. So husbands and wives who cherish each other's worth should never do this sort of thing. Love can quickly turn to hatred, and spouses turn to enemies, when we disobey the principle of fewness of wants. To lack this principle is to lack an important guarantee for the family's well-being.

The principle of fewness of wants is not an insignificant one. It's one that allows a husband and wife to keep a firm and stable hold on each other's hearts throughout time, one by which they can be loyal to each other in a way that will never fade. The money the family earns will all flow together into one place, and not go leaking out to feed the vultures and crows of sensual desire. No matter how much is spent, every penny goes toward the family's well-being.



The wealth gained by the family thus becomes a source of joy for them. Its expenditure is reasonable, benefiting both parents and children, so that its true value is realized.

This is why the Buddha teaches us to train our hearts in the way of the Dhamma. The heart is very important. A stable heart means stable wealth. If the heart is unstable, our wealth is unstable as well. It will leak away day and night, because the heart creates the leak and can't keep hold of anything at all. When a water jar is still intact, it can serve its full purpose. The minute it begins to crack, its usefulness is reduced; and when it breaks, there's no further use for it. The same holds true with a marriage. One's spouse is very important. There is no greater foundation for the wealth, security and happiness of the family than a relationship where both sides are honest, loyal and faithful to each other. So I ask that you put these principles into practice in yourself, your family and your work so that they lead you to lasting happiness and peace. Don't let yourself stray from the principles of moral virtue that protect and maintain your own inner worth, together with your family's peace and contentment.

The defilement of sexual craving, if left to itself, knows virtually no limits or sense of reason. As the Buddha said: "There is no river equal to craving." Rivers, seas and oceans, no matter how vast and deep, still have their banks, their shores, their islands and sandbars, but sensual craving has no limits, no islands or banks, no means for keeping itself within the bounds of moderation and propriety. It flows day and night, flooding its banks in the heart at all times. If we didn't have the teachings of moral virtue as a levee to keep it in check, the world would be in total chaos due to the pull of craving and jealousy. If we were to let sexual desire run wild, we'd be much more fierce than our friends in August and September, wiping one another out under the influence of sexual desire. On top of that, we would make such a display of our stupidity that we'd be the laughingstock of the animal kingdom. So for the sake of maintaining our honor as human beings and so that we won't be seen as fools in the eyes of our fellow animals, we must hold to moral virtue as our guide in knowing the proper bounds for our conduct as it affects both us and our families.

Moral virtue means behavior that is noble and good. It's a quality that gives security and stability to the world, a quality that the world has wanted all along. It's one of the highest forms of nourishment for the heart. Moral virtue is the aspect of reason that guarantees the correctness of our behavior; a quality which the beings of the world trust and never criticize – for it lies beyond criticism. Suppose we earn five dollars. However many dollars we spend, we spend them reasonably, not wastefully. If we earn one dollar, a hundred, a thousand, a million, we use reason in deciding how to spend or save our earnings so that we can benefit from them in line with their worth, in line with the fact that they have value in meeting our needs and providing for our happiness.

But if the heart leaks, if it lacks principles, our earnings will vanish like water from a leaky pot. No matter how much we earn, all will be wasted. Here I'm not talking about spending our wealth in ways that are useful and good. That's not called being wasteful. I'm talking about spending it in ways that serve no real purpose, in ways that can actually harm us. Wealth spent in those ways becomes a poison, a means for ruining its foolish owner in a way that is really shameful. People like this can't get any real use out of their wealth, simply because they lack the moral virtue that would ensure their security and that of their belongings. As a result, they bring disaster on themselves, their possessions and everything else that should give them happiness.

This is why it is so crucial to have moral virtue. A family with moral virtue as its guide and protection is secure. Its members can talk to one another. Instead of being stubborn and willful, they are willing to listen to one another's reasons, ensuring the smooth and proper course of their work and the other aspects of their life together. Just observing the five precepts faithfully is enough to bring peace in the family. The five precepts are like an overcoat to protect us from the cold, an umbrella to protect us from the rain or a safe to protect our valuables. Maintaining them protects the hearts of family members, especially the husband and wife, and keeps them from being damaged or destroyed by the unbounded force of craving.





The first precept speaks against killing living beings: The lives of all living beings – ours or anyone else's – are of equal worth. Each animal's life is of equal worth with the life of a human being, for if life is taken away from an animal, it can no longer remain an animal. If life is taken away from a person, he or she can no longer be a person. In other words, the continuity of the animal's being or of the person's being is broken right then in just the same way. We are taught not to destroy one another's lives because to do so is to destroy completely the value of one another's being. Death is a fear striking deeper than any other fear into the heart of each animal and every person. This is why the Buddha teaches us to keep our hands off the lives of our fellow living beings.

The second precept speaks against stealing: To steal, to take things that haven't been given by their owner, is to mistreat not only the owners' belongings, but also his or her heart. This is a very great evil, and one that we should never commit.

When talking of other people's belongings, even a single needle counts as a belonging. Personal belongings and their owner's heart are both things of value. Every person cherishes his or her belongings. If the belonging is stolen, the owner is bound to feel hurt. The heart is the important factor here, more



important than the item stolen. Losing a possession through theft feels very different from willingly giving it away. Feelings of regret, combined with the desire for revenge, can lead people to kill one another, even over a single needle. Because the issue of ownership is taken very seriously by people, we are taught not to steal. Theft has a devastating effect on the owner's heart – and that's a serious matter.

The act of stealing and the act of voluntary giving are two very different matters. When it's a question of voluntary giving, any amount is easy to part with. To say nothing of a single needle, we can be happy even when giving things away by the hundreds or thousands or millions. The person giving is happy and cheerful, the person receiving is pleased to no end, and both sides are blessed, as has always been the case when the people of the world aid and assist one another.

The Dhamma treats all hearts as equals. It holds that each being's heart is of value to that being, which is why it teaches us not to mistreat the hearts of others by taking their lives, stealing their belongings or having illicit sex with their spouses or children. All of these things have the heart of a living being as their owner. No good is accomplished by stealing the goods and provoking the hearts of others, because once the heart is provoked, it can be more violent than anything else. The murders that are committed everywhere usually have a sense of indignation, of having been wronged, as their motivating force. This is why the Buddha teaches us to follow moral virtue as a way of showing respect for one another's hearts and belongings.

This means that we should not abuse one another's hearts by doing immoral actions. For example, to kill a person is to devastate that person's heart and body, which also has a devastating effect on others close to that person

who will want to seek revenge. That person dies, but his friends and family still live, which ends up causing them to seek revenge, in turn causing further revenge going back and forth in an endless cycle for eons and eons.

The third precept speaks against illicit sex: All parents love their children; all husbands love their wives; all wives love their husbands. In any family, there is no greater love than that between the husband and wife. The husband and wife stake their lives on each other as if they were parts of the same body. There is no greater love in the family than his for her or hers for him. Their love is great and so is their sense of attachment and possessiveness. There is no other belonging that either of them cherishes nearly as much. If either of them is unfaithful or untrue to the other, looking outside for scraps and leftovers like a hungry mongrel, the other will feel more sorrow and disappointment than words can describe. It's like having one's chest slashed open and one's heart ripped out and scattered all over the place – even though one hasn't yet died. That's how much the wronged spouse will suffer.

If any of you are thinking of mistreating your spouse in this way, I ask that you first take a good long look at the teachings of the religion – the foremost Dhamma of the foremost Teacher – to see what kind of teachings they are, what kind of teacher he was, and why great sages honor and revere him so highly. As for the defilement of sexual craving, are there any sages who honor and revere it as anything special? So why is it that we honor and revere it so much? When you start considering in this way, you'll be able to resist and avoid these defilements at least to some extent. At the very least, you'll be one of the more civilized members of the circle of those who still have defilements in their hearts. Your spouse will be able to sleep peacefully, secure and proud, instead of swallowing tears of misery – which is the direction the world is heedlessly rushing everywhere you look. You are people in society. You have sharper eyes than the old monk sitting before you here saying this with his eyes and ears closed, so surely you've seen what I'm talking about.

For the sake of mutual honor and smooth relations between husband and wife, there are some duties in the family where he should be in charge, and

which she shouldn't interfere with unless he asks for her help. There are other duties where she should be in charge, and which he shouldn't interfere with unless she asks for his help. Each should let the other be in charge of whatever the other is best at. Each should honor and show deference to the other and not curse the other. Always show respect when you speak of your spouse's family. Never speak of them with contempt. Even though there may be times when your opinions conflict, keep the issue between just the two of you. Don't go dragging in each other's family background, for that would be to show contempt for your spouse's heart in a way that can't be forgotten, and can lead to a split in the family – something neither of you wants.

When differences of opinion come between you, don't be quick to feel anger or hatred. Think of the past, before you were married, and of how much you suffered from fear that your engagement would fall through. On top of that, think of all the trouble your families were put to as well. Now that you are married, in line with your hopes, you should care for your union to see that it lasts as long as you both are alive.

By becoming husband and wife, you willingly gave your lives to each other. If any issue arises between the two of you, think of it as teeth biting the tongue – they lie close together, so it's only normal that they should get in the way of each other now and then. Both of you share responsibility for each other, so you should regard your stability together as more important than the small issues between you that might hurt your relationship.

Always remember that both of you have left your parents and now each of you holds to the other as parent, friend and life-mate. Whatever you do, think of the heart of your owner – that is, the wife is the owner of the husband, and the husband the owner of the wife – and don't do anything that would hurt your owner's feelings. Anything without an owner to look after it, no matter what, tends to be unsafe, so always think of your owner. Don't be heedless or lax in your behavior, and your family will then be stable and secure.



All of this is part of the principle of fewness of wants. If you take this principle to heart, you can go wherever you like with a clear heart – whether your work keeps you at home or takes you away – for each of you can trust the other. The earnings you gain can provide for the family's happiness because you go in all honesty and work in all honesty for the sake of the family's well-being, contentment and peace.

Even if the family is lacking in some things – in line with the principle of impermanence – it's not nearly as serious as when a husband or wife starts looking outside. That's something very destructive. When a family has this sort of problem lurking inside it, then even if it has millions in the bank, it won't be able to find any happiness. But a family that lives by the principle of fewness of wants – keeping your husband in mind, keeping your wife in mind, keeping in mind what belongs to you and what belongs to others, without overstepping your bounds – is sure to be happy and at peace. Even if things may be lacking at times, the family can live in contentment.

The family relationship between husband and wife is the important factor in our lives as human beings. If this is sound, then when children are born they won't bear the emotional scars of having their parents fight over the issues that

arise when one of them goes out of bounds. When parents argue over other things – a lack of this or that or whatever – it's not too serious and can be taken as normal. But quarrelling over infidelity is very serious and embarrasses everyone in the family. So for this reason, you should always be very strict with yourself in this matter. Don't let yourself be heedless or lax in your behavior. As for quarrelling about other matters, you should be careful about that too. When parents quarrel for any reason, the children can't look one another in the face. When they go to school or out with their friends, they can't look their friends in the face, because of their embarrassment.

The fourth precept speaks against lying: Why did the Buddha teach us not to lie? Let's think about it. Is there anything good about lying? Suppose everyone in the country, everyone in the world, lied to one another whenever they met. Wherever you'd go, there'd be nothing but lies. You wouldn't be able to get the truth out of anyone at all. If this were the case, how could we human beings live with one another? It would be impossible. If we couldn't get any truth or honesty from one another, we wouldn't be able to live together. So in order that friends, husbands, wives, parents, children and people throughout society can live together and trust one another, we need to be honest and hold to truthfulness as a basic principle in all our dealings. Society will then have a strong foundation.

Here I'm giving just a short explanation of the fourth precept so that you will see how great the value of truthfulness is. People live together in harmony because of truthfulness, not because of lies and dishonesty. Lies are very destructive to the world. People who hope for one another's well-being should be entirely honest and truthful in their dealings. Lies are like disembodied spirits that deceive people and eat away at social values. This is why a society of good people despises those who tell lies and does its best to keep them out of its midst. The only people who like lying are those who harvest their crops from the hearts and livers of others; in other words, those who make their living by fraud and deceit. Thus, lying is a means of livelihood only for evil people, but is of absolutely no use to good people. The Buddha taught us not to lie because

lies are like executioners waiting to torture people and bring them to a bad end.

The fifth precept speaks against drinking alcohol: What is alcohol? Alcohol here refers to any intoxicant. It changes the person who takes it from a full human being to one with something lacking. The more we take it, the more we're lacking, to the point where we become raving lunatics. When we were newly born, our parents never gave us alcohol to drink. They gave us only healthy, nutritious things like food and mother's milk. We were able to grow to adulthood because of our mothers' milk and the other good nutritious foods our parents gave us. But after having grown up on good nutritious food, we then take alcohol and other intoxicants to poison and drug ourselves. Exactly where this adds to the value of our status as human beings is something I have yet to see.

Think about this for a minute: Suppose that all of us sitting here were drunk, from old Grandfather Boowa on down. Suppose we were all roaring drunk, sprawled all over the roadsides. Everywhere you went, there'd be people defecating and urinating in their pants all over the place, with no ordinary human sense of shame or embarrassment. Could you stand to look at it? If alcohol were really good, as people like to pretend it is, wouldn't then good people express their admiration for drunkards sprawled all over the roadsides, their urine and excrement covering themselves and their surroundings? "These drunkards are really outstanding, aren't they? They don't have to look for a place to defecate. They can do it right in their pants. Ordinary people can't do that. These drunkards are really extraordinary, aren't they?" Would they ever say anything like this?

This is why the Buddha cautioned us against drinking alcohol. He didn't want people all over the nation to be crazy, ruining their good human manners and ruining their work. A drunk person is no different from a dead person. He can't do any work – aside from boasting. He damages his intelligence and finds it easy to do anything at all with no sense of conscience or deference, no fear of evil or the results of kamma, no respect for people or places at all. He can go anywhere and say anything with no sense of shame or embarrassment. A drunk



person can speak without stopping from dawn to dusk. He talks endlessly, going around in circles, boring his listeners to death. After a while, "Well, it's time to get going." Then he starts talking again. Then, "Well, I guess I'd better be going." Then he starts talking again. He goes on and on like this all day long – "I guess I'd better be going," all day long, but he never goes – that's a drunk person. He speaks without any purpose, any aim, any substance, any concern for whether what he says is good or bad, right or wrong. He can keep babbling endlessly, without any sense of the time of day. That's drunkenness – no mindfulness, no restraint at all. A person at his stupidest is a drunk person; but he's also the one who boasts most of his cleverness. A drunk person is nothing but a crazy person, which is why we call alcohol 'crazy water'. Whoever wants to be a decent human being should refrain from it. There's nothing good about alcohol, so as good people how can we pretend that bad things – things that make us dizzy and drunk – can make us good in any way?

This has been just a short explanation of the five precepts, from the one against killing to the one against taking intoxicants. These precepts are called the principles of morality – principles for human beings, beings who are endowed with a high status, the status that comes with intelligence. Being an



intelligent human being means being clever in maintaining one's moral virtue, not clever in taking intoxicants, creating animosity or abusing other people. People of that sort aren't called intelligent. They're called foolish.

The teachings of the Buddha are correct, and appropriate for human beings to put into practice according to their position in life. There's nothing in the principles of the Dhamma to act as deadweight on the progress of the world. In fact, the world acts as deadweight on the Dhamma, destroying it without any real sense of conscience. When we act like that, all we lack is tails; otherwise we might be called dogs. Even without tails, we might be called dogs if we act in such a depraved manner. When we go out trying to snatch tails from dogs, we should watch out – they might bite us.

People have gotten way out of bounds. We say we've progressed, that we're advanced and civilized, but if we get so carried away with the world that we don't give a thought to what's reasonable, noble or right, then the material progress of the world will simply become a fire consuming the world and everyone in it, until eventually there's no world left to live in. We can't pretend that we're dogs, because we don't have tails. But if we try to snatch their tails, they'll bite us. This is what it means to be a fake human being. We can't pretend to be genuine human beings because we don't have any moral virtue to our name. We lack good enough manners to fit in with our status as human beings. On the other hand, we can't pretend we're animals because we don't have any

tails. These are the sorts of difficulties we get ourselves into, the damage we do to ourselves and the common good if we go against the teachings of the religion. And this is why the practice of the Dhamma is fitting for our true status as human beings – because the Buddha taught the religion to the human race.

Before you do anything, reflect on whether it's right or wrong. Don't act simply on your moods or desires. Moods and desires have no true standards. You can desire everything. Even when you've eaten your fill, you can still want more. Your desires are hungry – hungry all the time. That's desire. It has no standards or limits at all. The Buddha calls this the lower side of the mind.

This is why you need to use Dhamma to contemplate desire and take it apart to see what it wants. If, on reflection, you see that what it wants is reasonable, only then should you go ahead and act on it. But if it wants to eat and, after you've eaten, it still wants more, then ask it: "What more do you want to eat? The sky? Nobody in the world eats sky. Whatever people eat, you've already eaten. You've had enough already, so what more do you want?" When your desires are stubborn, you really have to come down hard on them like this if you want to be a good person of moderate wants.

If left to themselves, our desires and moods know no limits; so we must teach ourselves, even force ourselves, to stay within proper limits. If we act merely in line with our desires, the human race will degenerate. So we need to take the principles of moral virtue as our guide. The teachings of the religion are an important means to ensure that we are good people living in happiness and peace. If we lack moral virtue, then even if we search for happiness until the day we die, we'll never find it. Instead, we'll find nothing but suffering and discontent. What's right and appropriate, no matter who you are, is putting the teachings of the religion into practice. To lack Dhamma – in other words, to lack goodness and virtue – is to lack the tools you need to find happiness.

The world is becoming more and more troubled each day because we lack moral virtue in our hearts and actions. All we see is the world acting as deadweight on moral virtue, trampling it to bits. Don't go thinking that moral virtue

is deadweight on the world. Moral virtue has never harmed the world in any way. Actually, the world tramples all over moral virtue and destroys it, leaving us empty-handed, without any guiding principles. We end up destroying one another in a way that's really appalling. So I ask that you see both the harm that comes from a lack of moral virtue and the value of putting moral virtue into practice. You yourself will prosper, your family will prosper and society will prosper because you have the Dhamma as a shield for your protection.

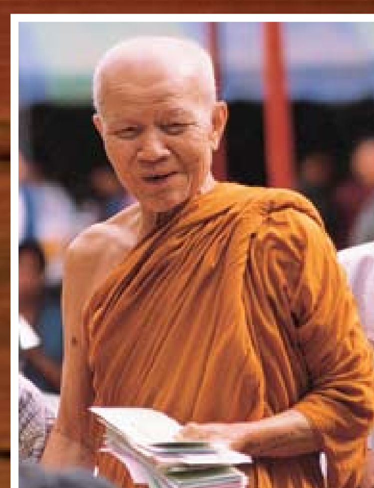
Our worth as human beings comes from our moral behavior, you know. It doesn't come from our skin and flesh the way it does with animals. When animals such as fish and crabs die, you can take their flesh to the market and come back with money in your pockets; but try taking the flesh of a dead person to the market and see what happens. Everyone in the market will scatter in an uproar. Since when has our human worth lain with our skin and flesh? It lies with a heart that is adorned with moral virtue. People with moral virtue are people of value. Wherever they live, everything is at peace and at ease.

When we have moral virtue as our adornment, we're attractive in a way that never loses its appeal, no matter how old we get. We have value precisely because of our virtue. If moral virtue is lacking in a family, that family will tend to become more and more troubled. If virtue is very much lacking, the family will be very much troubled; if it's completely lacking, the whole family will be destroyed.

I ask that you contemplate what I've said and put it into practice so as to rid yourselves of the dangers that have been threatening you and your family, allowing you instead to meet with nothing but happiness and peace. In particular, husbands and wives should be determined to treat one another well. I ask that you treat your spouse as having equal worth with yourself. Don't try to debase your spouse's value and exalt your own through the power of your moods. Treat each other as having equal value, both in moral terms and in terms of the family. Your family will then prosper and be happy.









Medicine *for* the Mind







This world of ours – no matter how hot and feverish it may get – still has the teachings of the Buddha to cure its ailments. At the very least, it has the religion as a medicine to relieve its suffering to some extent. Suffering resembles a disease in that no matter how serious it may get, we can gain at least some relief if we have medicine to treat it.

If the hearts of the world – our hearts – take their orders only from defilements and suffering, then no matter what our race, class or nationality we won't be able to find happiness and peace in the world at all, because our hearts have no Buddhist teachings to give them relief.

Buddhist teachings are teachings that adhere to the principles of cause and effect. In its most basic sense, the Buddhist religion means cause and effect combined. To believe in the religion means to believe in the correct principles of cause and effect, and not to resist them. If we practice in line with these principles, there will be a way to reduce the pain and suffering of the world, both within and without.

People who don't have any religious principles inside – no matter where they live, no matter how well-educated or how wealthy they may be – cannot find any happiness. They cannot set down the burdens of their hearts for even a moment because they have no place to set them down. Where could they possibly set them down? All they have is a flaming mass of defilements, made up of their insatiable desires. Each of their desires creates pain and suffering, which then turns around to burn them. But for the most part, they fail to meet with the things they want, and instead keep meeting with things they don't want. This is the direction in which the defilements lead the beings of the world.

But when we let the power of cause and effect – the power of the Dhamma – take the lead, then even though we meet with some pain and difficulties by going against the defilements when following the way of reason, the eventual results will give us enough happiness and pleasure to relax and unwind

our sufferings. This is why the religion is an extremely essential teaching for people's hearts. We human beings – who are more intelligent than the other beings of the world – should have the teachings of the religion as a treasure to adorn and protect our thoughts, words and deeds, making the various aspects of our behavior beautiful to the eye and cooling to the heart.

The religion is an offshoot of pure Dhamma. It branches off from the superlative Dhamma – the marvelous Dhamma discovered by the Buddha – and takes the form of a prescription that says, "Do this… Don't do that," and so forth, so that we can follow it and not be at odds with the path of Dhamma. Once we trust the principle of cause and effect, then no matter how difficult the path may be we give it our best, even when it goes against the grain. Actually, going against the grain means going against the defilements, which are the enemies of the Dhamma. In other words, doing those things that are in keeping with the Dhamma goes against the grain of the defilements. So happiness, peace and calm are bound to follow.

I'll give you an example: Suppose you think about something today that gets you all worked up and upset. Your entire heart becomes a mass of flame. This is especially true if it is something that has really annoyed you and made you indignant. The mind gets wrapped up in the things that annoy it and make it upset. Day and night, sitting, standing, walking and lying down, you won't let them go. You take them, instead of your meditation object, as your preoccupation, so how can the result be happiness? It has to be fire, burning continuously – because the matter itself is fire, and your thoughts about it are fire, so how can you expect them to result in any 'water' at all? They'll have to result in more fire; there are no two ways about it. The more you persist in dwelling on them, the more you damage your own heart. The final result is that you can't eat or sleep and hardly have enough presence of mind to put a stop to your thoughts. There are many cases where people go crazy in this way, destroyed by the things they think about.

What causes this destruction? Affairs of the defilements, not the affairs of Dhamma. For this reason, when you resist thinking about bad things, when you

block bad trains of thought with mindfulness and break them off with wisdom – even though it's difficult and goes against the grain – the result you can expect is mental peace, or at least enough mindfulness to contemplate the proper path to follow. You can then evaluate what's right and what's wrong concerning the topic you've been thinking about and see why you felt compelled to think about it in the first place. "You know it's no good, so why think about it? Can't you straighten yourself out for your own good?"

This is how reason – the principle of cause and effect – deals with the matter. All its deliberations are for the sake of seeing the harm of those preoccupations, since pain and suffering are already clearly obvious in the thoughts of your hot and troubled heart. "If you persist in dwelling on it any further, what's going to happen to you? As it is, the suffering is already blatant. If you keep thinking in that way, won't it grow until it overflows your heart? How will you be able to hold up under the strain? If you keep thinking in that way, the suffering will just keep growing. Where will you find the strength to withstand the suffering your thoughts keep churning out about the things that have you so upset? Are you still going to keep thinking about them? Are you still going to keep piling more and more suffering on yourself?"

Just thinking in this way is enough to bring the mind to its senses. And as soon as the mind comes to its senses, it can begin to calm down and rein itself in. It can try to let go of that preoccupation by using reason to push itself away and bring its thought processes under control. The suffering that resulted from those thoughts will also be brought under control, because the causes – those hot, burning thoughts – have been curbed. And you're able to curb them because mindfulness has reined them in. This is enough to show that your ability to resist those thoughts with mindfulness and evaluate them with wisdom gives calm and peace to the heart. And at that point, the suffering is curbed and disappears.

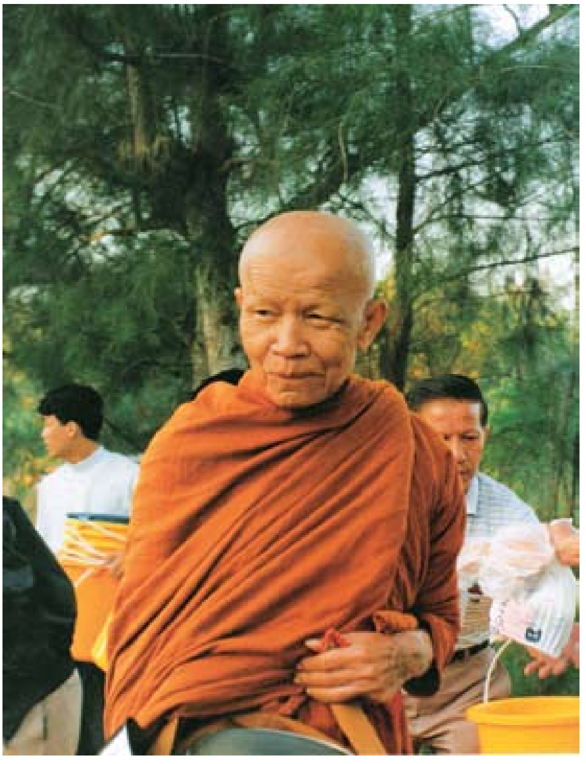
Although the heart can be hard to restrain, hard to control, we should try to think up strategies for unburdening it in this way. Admittedly this is difficult, but it's a difficulty of the right path, for it results in well-being and happiness.

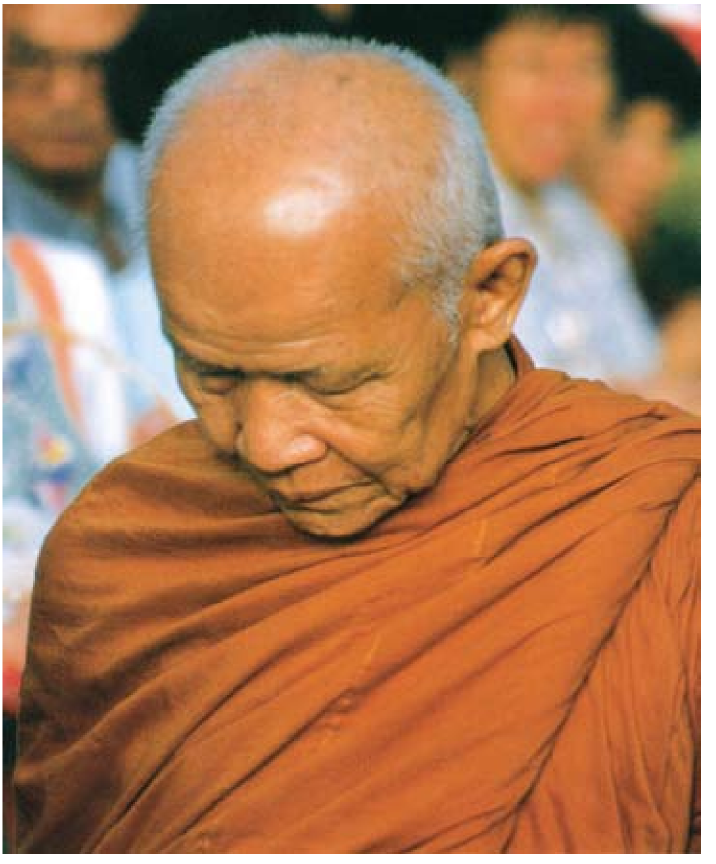
 

The affair is no longer troubling and upsetting, so our sufferings stop piling on. We have a chance to relax and unburden ourselves of those burning embers – pain and suffering in the heart. This is one principle we can use in evaluating all the bad things that come our way.

For example, suppose that people curse you or spread gossip about you. You don't know how many days, how many months ago that curse or that gossip passed through their lips and out of their memory, but you find out about it today and immediately get upset. Actually, you don't know how many months or years ago the breath with which they cursed you or gossiped about you passed through their lips, but now a new breath passes through somebody else's lips and into your ears: "They said this about you… Mr. X and Ms. Y said these awful things about you." This second breath is the one you grab onto for no good reason and end up burning yourself with it. This is because of your own wrong assumptions. If that second person hadn't told you, your heart would have been perfectly fine, even though those other people actually said those things about you. At the time it happened, you didn't feel anything at all, because your heart hadn't stirred itself up to be aware of those things. Your mind was in its normal state, unaffected by pain or distress.

If we're mindful when people say these sorts of things, we immediately realize that nothing good can come of it, so why should we grab hold of it to defile the mind? We've already had experience with dirty things, haven't we?





When we walk along a road and come across something dirty, we give it a wide berth. We don't want to touch it, not even with the soles of our feet, because we know that there's nothing good about it. If we touch it, we're sure to get dirty too. So why do we like to let the mind roll around in things we know are dirty? Why do we like to mess with them and think about them? It's stupid to let ourselves get worked up over such things to the point where the entire mind is defiled and burning hot.

When we think in this way, we can put a stop to those thoughts and concerns. The moment we start thinking about them again, mindfulness is there – quick and alert – so that we can let them go, instead of holding onto them to burn the heart again and again.

If you use this principle of Dhamma as a medicine to protect yourself in all your activities, your mind can keep its equilibrium and will rarely ever harm itself with the things that make contact through your senses of sight, hearing,

smell, taste and touch. Even if the thoughts that arise exclusively in the mind disturb you with unpleasant memories from the past, you'll be able to shake them off immediately because mindfulness and wisdom are right there with the heart. You get immediate results as soon as you put them to use. Problems arise only when we completely forget our protectors – mindfulness and wisdom – and let bad things come in and trample our hearts so that we must endure the resulting pain. If we could admit the fact that suffering comes from our own stupidity and heedlessness, there would be no reason to complain about it.

In fact, people all over the world do complain. Why? Because they don't want to suffer. If they don't want to suffer, then why do they keep thinking in ways that lead to suffering? Because they aren't alert to what's happening inside themselves. When this is the case, what can they use to be alert to these things? They have to use mindfulness and wisdom to keep up with what's happening inside the mind. In that way, they can hold on to at least something for themselves in the beginning stages of the practice. With constant practice, they'll eventually be able to keep up with everything that happens inside the mind.

This is how we use Buddhist principles to deal with our minds. If all of us in the world used reason as our guide, in both our internal and external affairs, we would all understand and avoid anything that posed a danger to us individually or to the common good. We wouldn't persist in destroying ourselves and others by flirting recklessly with dangerous mental states. At the same time, we'd reflect in ways that produce benefit to ourselves and the common good. The whole world would prosper and flourish, and we'd all be happy and at peace. When we take Buddhist principles as our guide, they lead us in the direction of peace through correct practice in line with the principle of cause and effect, which is a universal principle leading to the prosperity of the world.

This is why the religion is something essential for enabling us to live together. In the present, we can be happy and secure, free from trouble and turmoil in body and mind. If the religion spreads out through society so that each person feels this way, the world will be at peace. When we turn to consider the future state of the mind – what trouble can the mind come to when it holds to

reason as its basic principle, when it has Dhamma within? After all, the mind itself produces its own troubles. So if it doesn't produce trouble for itself, and if it has the Dhamma as its protection, then no matter what world the mind goes to after death, it won't be oppressed by pain and suffering.

The principles of Dhamma teach that a mind possessing inner quality is unlikely to be reborn in a place where it will meet with suffering and pain, because it hasn't made the type of kamma that could force it to go there. All it has is the goodness – the inner worth – that will support it and convey it to good destinations, one after another. That's what its future holds in store.

A person who practices Dhamma, who has Dhamma in the heart, is far different from a person without any Dhamma. Even though they both may live in the same world and have the same sort of appearance, the differences in their knowledge, thoughts, views and actions are enormous, so there is no way they can expect to receive similar results. The results must differ just like the causes. This has been true from time immemorial.

This is why the Buddha said: "Kamma is what differentiates beings, from the basest to the most refined." These differences do not arise from anything outside of kamma, which is why kamma is the biggest issue facing living beings. Why is it big? Because each of us is constantly creating kamma. Even if we don't realize that we're creating kamma, the good and bad results that come from our actions cannot be avoided.

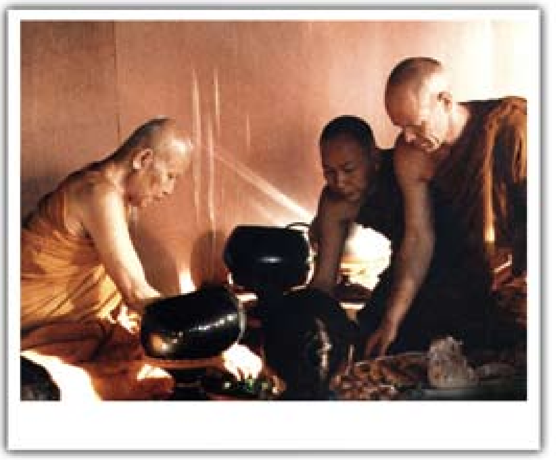
What is kamma? The word kamma means action. Our thoughts are called mental kamma; our words, verbal kamma; our deeds, bodily kamma. In each case, we are the ones who constantly perform such actions, so how can we expect to prevent the consequences of those actions from arising in the future? And as we are constantly producing good and evil actions, the moral consequences of those actions have the power to determine where we will be reborn in the future. In this respect, there's no power acting over and above the results of the kamma we ourselves have made. There's no power greater than the results of our own actions. These results are what support us or oppress us after

the kamma has been done. This is what the principles of the religion teach. They don't have us believe in the power of anything outside of the good and bad activity of our thoughts, words and deeds. This is where our insurance and our guarantee lie. So this, and only this, is what can either destroy or help us. Nothing else can destroy or help us at all.

Our bad thoughts, words and deeds are the means by which we destroy ourselves. Our good thoughts, words and deeds are the means by which we help and foster ourselves. The way which we can ensure that we won't fall into undesirable situations lies here, and only here – in the principle of kamma. There's no power higher than this, which is why we shouldn't harbor unreasonable fears about this or that.

The things we should fear most are any thoughts, words and deeds which create dangers for us. We should realize that the true danger is what's coming out in our thoughts, words and deeds right now. If we aren't willing to come to our senses and straighten ourselves out, these acts will constitute the most serious danger we face, not only now but on into the future, until the kamma we've done reaches the end of its power and effectiveness. That's when the danger and suffering will end.

If we believe in the religion, we have to believe in the principle of kamma and the results that spring from it. Is there anyone among us who has gone beyond creating kamma? No one at all. Each of us has to create kamma. Whether or not we believe in Buddhism, we're all creating kamma. It is a principle of the nature of action inherent within us, a principle of cause and effect correctly taught by the Buddha when he said that all of us have our kamma. We can believe this or not as we like, but that has no power to erase the truth of kamma. There is no way that either kamma or its results can be erased. Kamma has to remain as kamma and give good or bad results throughout each lifetime. There's no power above kamma and its results, which come from our own good and bad actions. So we shouldn't harbor blind and unreasonable fears. If you're afraid of hell, you should be afraid of the pit you're digging right now in your heart. That's the important one, the real pit of hell!



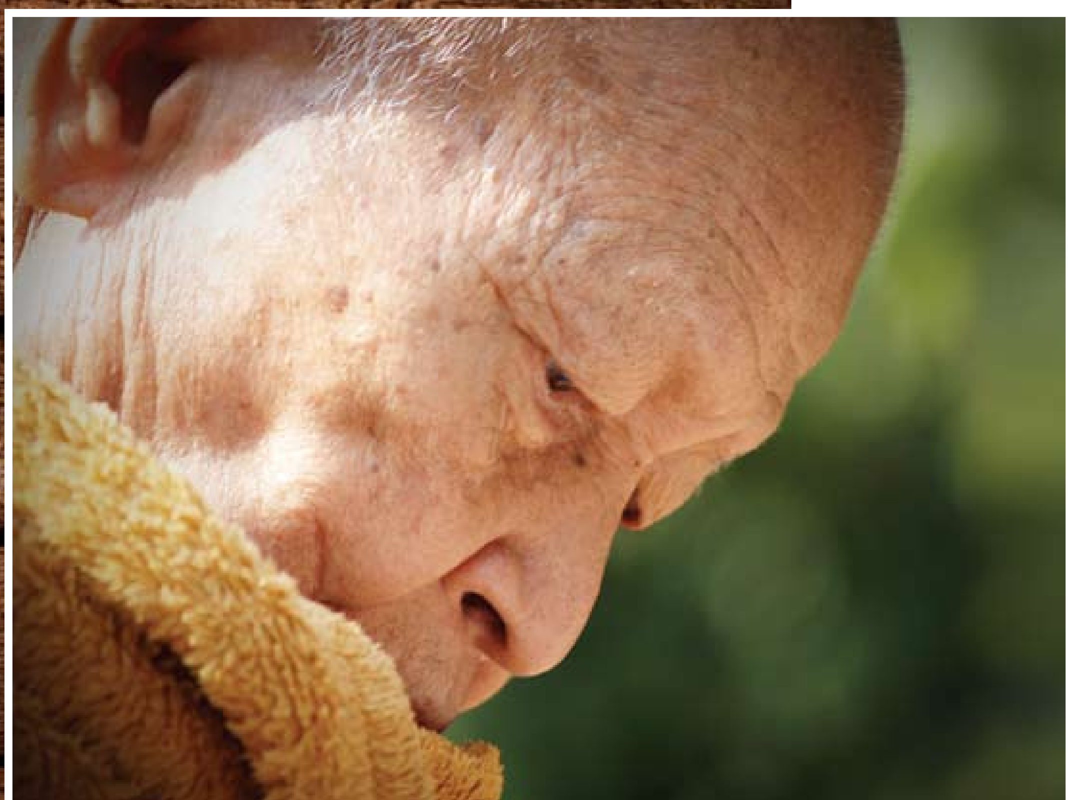
The factor that causes the fires of hell to burn you is right there in your heart. So come to your senses and use mindfulness and wisdom to investigate the factors of your mind that are thinking wrongly and creating danger, or thinking rightly and creating inner quality within your heart. Make your choices here and follow them through carefully so that there will be no more dangers for you or any other beings in the world.

So then. Is the religion really necessary? Right here is where we should decide. The person who taught us the religion – the Buddha – fully knew the ways of kamma and its results. There's no way you can dispute with him. He knew everything of every sort concerning his own kamma and that of other living beings, as well as the results of his own kamma and that of all living beings throughout the three levels of existence. No one else can even try to reach the full extent of his knowledge of kamma. He proclaimed these truths so that we could conduct ourselves without error – unless of course we go against his teachings by doing things that are bad, so that the results end up going against our wishes and lead to disappointment and suffering. Right here is where the basic principle lies.

Which is why I said: If we in the world have the teachings of the religion in our hearts, then no matter how much suffering we meet, we'll have a place to put it down. It's comparable to a disease. If we can treat it with medicine, instead of simply letting it follow the full course of its strength, there's a chance for us to recover.







Right Here *in the* Heart





When you listen to a Dhamma talk, pay close attention to your heart, for that's where the Dhamma lies – in the heart. At first, before I had practiced meditation, I didn't believe that the Dhamma lay with the heart. "How could that be?" I thought. "The Dhamma comes with making an effort in the heart. That sounds better than saying the Dhamma lies with the heart."

"The Dhamma lies with the heart. The Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha lie in the heart. All dhammas lie in the heart." I didn't believe this. All 84,000 sections of the Dhamma lie in the texts – that's how I felt at first. But as I kept listening to my teachers explain things, none of them ever deviated from this point: "The Dhamma lies in the heart. The Dhamma lies with the heart." As I kept listening to this, my mind gradually settled down and grew still.

At first, when I listened to a Dhamma talk, I'd focus my attention on the speaker, instead of keeping it focused on myself. "Don't focus your attention outside," they'd say. "Keep conscious of what's going on inside yourself. The Dhamma being explained will come in and make contact with you on its own." I wouldn't listen to this. I kept focusing my attention on the speaker. In fact, I'd even want to watch his face as he talked. It got to the point where if I didn't watch his face, didn't watch his mouth as he talked, I didn't feel right. That's how I was at the beginning.

But as time passed, I came to find that stillness would appear in my heart while I was listening to the Dhamma. That's when I began to believe: "The Dhamma of concentration does lie right here in the heart." I began to have a witness – myself. So from that point on, I wouldn't send my attention anywhere outside while listening to a Dhamma talk. I wouldn't even send it to the speaker, because I was absorbed in the stillness in my heart. My heart would grow still as I listened – cool, calm and absorbed. This made me believe: "They're right. The Dhamma does lie with the heart!"

That's when I began to believe this – when the Dhamma of concentration, mental stillness and calm appeared in my heart as I listened to the Dhamma. This made me want to keep on listening as a means of stilling and calming the heart.

As time passed and I continued my meditation, the results of my practice always appeared in the heart. They didn't appear anywhere else. When the mind wasn't still, then whatever was disturbing it could be found in the heart. I'd know: "Today my heart doesn't feel right." It would be distracted and restless according to its moods. "Eh? Why doesn't my heart feel right today?" This made me interested from another angle. I'd try my best to calm the heart down. As soon as it got back into place with its meditation, it settled down and became still. This made the point very clear – Dhamma does lie in the heart.

The world lies in the heart. The Dhamma lies in the heart. For this reason, when you listen to a Dhamma talk you should keep your attention focused right inside yourself. There's no need to send it outside – to have anything to do with the person speaking, for instance. When you keep your awareness focused inside yourself this way, the Dhamma being explained will come in and make contact with your awareness.

The heart is what is aware. When the current of sound dealing with the Dhamma comes in and makes continual contact with the heart, the heart won't have a chance to slip outside, because the Dhamma is something calming and absorbing. This moment, that moment, it keeps you absorbed from moment to moment with the current of sound coming from the speaker. Step after step, it keeps making contact. The heart gradually becomes more and more quiet, more and more still. This way you already start seeing the rewards that come from listening.

This is why, if you want to listen to the Dhamma in the right way for getting clear results, you have to keep your attention focused firmly inside yourself. There's no need to send it outside, and no need to engage in a lot of thinking while you're listening. Simply let the mind follow along with the current of

Dhamma being explained, and the Dhamma will seep into your heart. When the mind doesn't get itself worked up with thoughts about various things, it becomes still; that's all there is to it. But to grow still, it needs something to counteract its thoughts. It won't settle down on its own simply because you want it to. You have to use one Dhamma theme or another, or the sound of Dhamma while a Dhamma talk is going on. Only then can it grow still.

Where is the greatest turmoil in the world? There's no greater turmoil than the one in the heart. If we talk about things murky and turbid, there's nothing more murky and turbid than the heart. Nothing at all can compare with the heart in being troubled and pained. Even the heat of fire isn't nearly as hot as a heart aflame with mental defilements.

Defilements do nothing but make us suffer, step after step. This is why we're taught to see their harm. We must be intent on keeping mindfulness established and investigate things from various angles. When mindfulness and awareness keep in touch with each other, then our practice of concentration and our investigation of things from the various angles of wisdom keep getting results step by step.

For example, the Buddha teaches us: "Birth is suffering. Death is suffering. These are Noble Truths." Birth is suffering, but we're pleased by birth. When a child is born, we're happy. When a grandchild is born, when our friends and relatives have children, we're happy. We don't think of the pain and suffering the child goes through, surviving almost certain death in that narrow passage before being born.

If we don't look at both the beginning point – birth – and the endpoint – death – so as to see them clearly, both these points will cause us unending joy and sorrow. Actually, the child has to survive almost certain death before it can become a human being. If it doesn't survive, it dies right then – either in the womb or at the moment of birth – because it's pained to the point of death. That's how we human beings die. Once we're born, then no matter what our age, we have to be pained to the point of death before we can die.

Pain is something we've experienced from the moment of birth, but we don't see it as a Noble Truth. Actually, it's something we should see as harmful, dangerous and threatening, so that we can find a way to transcend it through our own efforts – and especially through the efforts of our mindfulness and wisdom. When we enjoy the beginning but dislike the end – when we like birth but dislike death – we're contradicting the truth all the time. And where can we get any happiness with these contradictions in the heart? They have to make us suffer. There are no two ways about it.

In order to put the beginning and end in line with each other, we must contemplate the entire course of events – to see that birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, death is suffering – for these three are all bound up with pain and suffering. They're the path leading to suffering and discontent, not the path leading to Nibbana, so we cannot progress along the right path until we have thoroughly understood them through skillful investigation. The Buddha teaches: "There is no suffering for those without birth." When there's no birth, where will there be any suffering? When there are no seeds for birth, there are simply no seeds for suffering, so suffering does not exist in the heart. This is why Enlightened Ones have no feelings of discontent or pain in their hearts. They have no moods in their hearts at all. No happy, sad or indifferent moods exist in the heart of an Arahant.

Arahants have all three kinds of feelings in their bodies: they feel physical pain just like we do, but their hearts have no moods. Physical feelings have no effect on their hearts. Their hearts aren't swayed by such influences the way ordinary hearts are. They know pleasure, pain and neutral feeling in their bodies, but there are no corresponding moods in their hearts – because they have gone beyond all moods. Their hearts are pure, unadulterated Dhamma, which no defilement can infiltrate. Feelings of pleasure and pain are all impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self, so they can't possibly get involved with the nature of a pure heart.

If you want your heart to prosper and grow toward purity, strive to develop inner goodness. Don't let the qualities of generosity and moral virtue lapse.

They are good qualities for nourishing your heart and connecting it up with good states of rebirth. If you have a good foundation of inner worth as your sustenance, then no matter where you're reborn, that goodness will stick close to you so that you can look forward to a good destination.



As long as we have yet to gain release from suffering, we are taught to exert ourselves fully without being lazy or complacent. Polish the heart every day. When the heart is polished every day, it's bound to shine. And when the heart is shining, you're bound to see your reflection, just as when water is clear you can see clearly whatever plants or animals there are in the water.



Once the heart is still, you'll be able to see whatever poisons or dangers it contains much more easily than when it's murky and turbulent with defiling preoccupations. This is why we're taught to purify the heart. In the teachings gathered in the Patimokkha exhortation, we're taught:

Never do any evil,
Develop skillfulness fully,
Cleanse the heart until it is pure:
These are the Buddhas' teachings.



This is what all the Buddhas teach, without exception. Whatever is evil or debasing they teach us not to do, telling us instead to do only things that are skilful, through the power of our own wisdom. Developing skillfulness fully means developing wisdom fully.

Cleansing the heart until it is pure is hard to do, but it lies within our capacity as human beings to do it. The Buddha went through hardships, his disciples went through hardships, all those who have reached purity have had to go through hardships, but these were hardships for the sake of gaining purity and release, which is what makes them worth going through.

When the heart is overcome with dirt and defilement, it does not seem to have any value at all. Even we can see the fault in ourselves. We may decide that we'd rather put an end to it all. We're so disgusted and fed up with life that we're ashamed to show our face to the world. And all of this happens when the heart is very murky and dark, to the point where it becomes a smoldering fire.

Life doesn't seem worth living when the heart is overwhelmed by things that are so hopelessly dark. The heart seems worthless, which is why we think it would be better to die. But where will we get anything 'better' after we die? Even in the present, nothing is good. The world has had people dying a long time now; if things got better with death, why isn't the world any better than it is? There's no good in us – that's why we want to die. Once the heart is good, however, it has no problem with life or death, because it's filled with goodness.

A heart overcome by worthless things seems thoroughly worthless. But when we wash these things away, step by step, the heart gradually starts showing some of its inner radiance. It starts growing peaceful and calm. The entire heart becomes radiant. Happy. Relaxed. Whatever we do – sitting, standing, walking, lying down or whatever work we do – we're happy with the pleasure that has appeared in the heart.

When the heart is peaceful and calm, then wherever we are, we're content. The important point lies with the heart. If the heart lacks goodness, then nothing is good, no matter where we are. We keep fooling ourselves: "Over here might be good. Over there might be good. This lifetime is no good. The next lifetime will be better. Living is no good. Dying would be better." We keep fooling ourselves. The troubled part of the mind – that's what fools us. The part

that's stirred up by various issues – that's what fools us. "This will be good… That will be good," but it's not good at all. No matter where we go, we end up the same as where we started – because the essential part is no good. We must straighten that out and make it good through our own efforts.

Begin by practicing concentration so that the heart can be still. You must constrain the heart when you are practicing for concentration. The time when you're constraining the heart and training it to meditate is not the time to let it go wandering as it likes. We call this making an effort, being persistent – making a persistent effort to straighten out the heart and uproot its enemies, until the heart can grow still. The heart grows still because our efforts force it to, not because we let it go wandering as it likes. This is when we see the rewards of our efforts, because the heart has been brought to stillness and remains there through those efforts. When the goodness of the heart increases as the result of our effort, the value of effort becomes more and more apparent.

When the time comes to investigate in terms of wisdom, focus on seeing things clearly. Contemplate everything in the world so as to see it in line with the truth. The world may be infinitely wide, but when the heart is obscured by defilements, you're caught in a very narrow and confining state of mind. When the heart feels confined it weighs heavily on itself, so you experience no comfort at all. You must open it up right where it's confining and give it space to blossom and be bright. It'll then feel free, calm and at ease.

This is the point in meditation where you can investigate pain, because the mind now has the strength to probe into it. It's ready and willing to investigate because pain is a whetstone for sharpening wisdom. Concentration and wisdom are what we use to eliminate mental defilements. Wisdom is what uproots them, but concentration is what first catches them and ties them down. Concentration stills the heart and gathers it into one place so that it doesn't get scattered around to the point where you can't catch hold of it. Once the heart is gathered into one, wisdom opens it up and unravels it to see clearly where its concerns and attachments lie – with sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations, or with form, feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. Wisdom

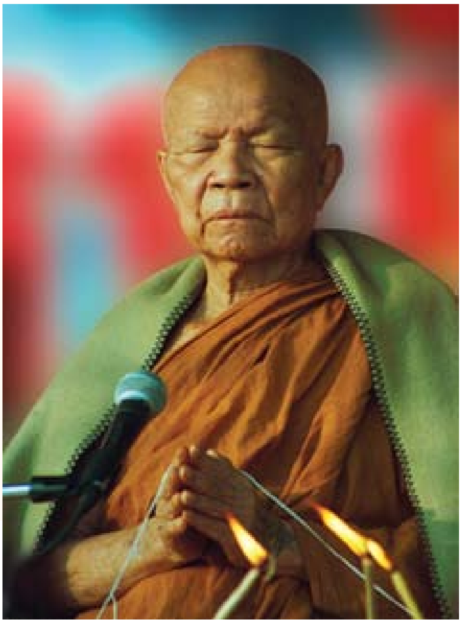


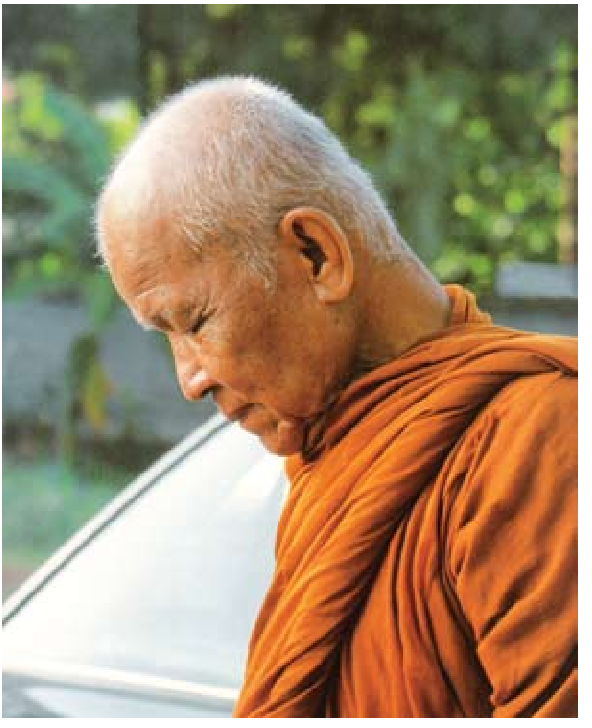
takes these things apart to see them in thorough detail, in line with the truth as it actually is.

Wisdom contemplates these things and investigates them, over and over again. These are the points where it travels. These are its whetstones. The more it investigates them, the more it branches out, step by step, understanding things for what they are and letting them go. Letting them go means putting down the burdens that weigh on the heart under the sway of attachment.

What is the mind thinking about? What good does it get from its thoughts? The moment a thought forms, it ceases. A good thought? It forms and ceases. A bad thought? It forms and ceases. Whatever the thought, it forms and ceases. These are called thought-formations. They form. They arise. They cease. Their forming and ceasing happen together. They arise and cease in the same instant. So how can we attach a sense of self to these things – to this arising-ceasing, arising-ceasing?

Investigate pain, which is something we all fear. Everyone fears the word "pain", so how can we hold onto it as ours? Are you going to persist in holding to this mass of pain as you? To hold to pain as your 'self' is to hold onto fire to





burn the heart. Know pain simply as pain. What knows the pain isn't the pain. It's the heart. The heart is what knows all about the pain. When pain arises, the heart knows. When pain remains, the heart knows. When the pain ceases, the heart knows. It knows through its wisdom. Wisdom sees clearly and distinctly that pain is pain, and what knows is what knows. The two are separate realities.

The function of memory recognizes and gives meaning to things we experience through the senses. When sense objects arise, the mind establishes a meaning for them that then ceases in the same instant. Can this be our 'self'? We recognize the meaning, and then it ceases, arises and ceases, arises and ceases like everything else. Can this sort of thing be our 'self'? Can this sort of thing be ours? If it's us, if it's ours, then we're wriggling all the time because of memory and pain. Memory arises and ceases. Pain arises and ceases, arises and ceases, giving us trouble and turmoil without letup, without stop. This is why we have to investigate so as to see those conditions – the factors of body and mind – that arise and cease all around us, all around the heart.

Consciousness: How long have we been conscious of sights and sounds? Since birth. And what lasting worth have we ever gained from these things?

As soon as we're conscious of anything by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue or body – Blip! – it ceases in the same instant, the very same instant. So what lasting worth can you get from it? Nothing at all. Can sights be our 'self'? Can sounds? Can smells, tastes, tactile sensations be our 'self'? Consciousness – acknowledging whatever makes contact – can this be our 'self'? It acknowledges – Blip! Blip! Blip! – and immediately ceases. Can this be our 'self'? There's no way it can be.

How can we hold to this arising and immediate ceasing as our 'self'? How can we put our trust in these things? They merely arise and cease, continuously. Are we going to persist in holding to this arising and ceasing as our 'self'? If so, we're in turmoil all day long because these things are arising and ceasing all the time! No matter whether they are form, feeling, memory, thought or consciousness, they're constantly arising and ceasing, each and every one of them. So how can we grab onto them as ours even though we know full well that they arise and cease? This is why we have to use wisdom to investigate them so as to see clearly what they really are and then let them go accordingly.

What knows does not cease. The true heart – what knows – never ceases. It knows whatever ceases, but "that which knows" doesn't cease. Form, feeling, memory, thought and consciousness arise and cease in their own natural way. They're all natural phenomena that are subject to the three characteristics. The three characteristics are impermanence, dissatisfaction and not-self. How can we believe things of this sort really belong to us? If we investigate into their causes and effects using mindfulness and wisdom, there is no way we can hold onto them. We are deluded into becoming attached to them only because our defilements are so thick that the heart doesn't see things clearly. Once we've investigated so as to see these things for what they really are, the heart lets go of its own.

When the time to go into battle arrives – at the time of death – take these things as your battlefield. In particular, feelings of pain will stand out more than anything else when things start to break apart. Take pain and the heart as your battlefield. Investigate them so as to see their truth. No matter how great the

pain may be, it doesn't go past death. Pain goes only as far as death. The body goes only as far as death, but the heart doesn't cease at death. It goes past death, because the heart has never died. It transcends all these things. Pain is pain only as far as death. It doesn't go past it. No matter what feelings arise, they go only as far as their ceasing, and that's all. Whether they're very painful or only a little painful, the heart knows them as they are at all times.

When mindfulness is present, the heart knows each stage of painful feeling that appears. That which knows the pain doesn't cease, so why should we be worried and concerned about pains, which are just conditions that arise. They depend on the heart for their arising, but they aren't the heart. They depend on the body for their arising, but they aren't the body. They're merely feelings. Pain, for instance, is something different, something separate from the body and heart. That's the actual truth.

When we don't try to contradict the truth, the heart reaches peace through its investigation of pain, especially in the last stage of life when the body is breaking up. You can see what ceases first and what ceases after because what knows will keep on knowing. Even when everything else has ceased, what knows still won't cease. All it takes is for you to see causes and effects in this way just once, and your courage in the face of death will spring right into action. When death comes, you'll immediately take the fighting stance of a warrior going into battle. You'll take mindfulness and wisdom as your weapons as you slash your way through to the truth. And when you've destroyed everything in your path, where will you end up? Right there with the truth.

Use your mindfulness and wisdom to slash down to the truth of everything of every sort. When you reach the truth, everything will be leveled. Everything will be still. Nothing will be left to disturb the heart. If anything is still disturbing the heart, that means you haven't investigated fully down to its truth. Once you've reached the full truth in every way, nothing can disturb or provoke the heart at all. There's nothing but a state of truth permeating throughout. This is called being leveled and made still by the truth, which comes through the power of mindfulness and wisdom investigating to see things clearly.

The Buddha and his Arahant disciples transcended pain and suffering right here – right where pain and suffering exist. They exist in the body, in the mind and in the heart. When we take things apart, we take them apart right here. When we know, we know right here – right where we are deluded. Wherever we don't yet know, mindfulness and wisdom – our tools for slashing our way into the truth – will make us know. There's nothing to equal mindfulness and wisdom in breaking through to the endpoint of all phenomena, in washing away all defilements and absolutely eliminating them from the heart. They are thus the most up-to-date tools for dealing with mental defilements of every sort.

So put mindfulness and wisdom to use when you need them, and especially when you're about to die. There's no one else who can help you then. Even if your entire family is thronged all around you, none of them can really help. Everything depends on you. As the Buddha says: "The self is its own mainstay." Realize this in full measure! What can you do to be your own mainstay and not your own adversary? If you bring up only weakness, confusion and lack of wisdom, you'll be your own worst enemy. If you use mindfulness, wisdom, conviction, persistence and courage in line with the principles taught by the Buddha, investigating down to the causes and effects and the facts of all the conditions of nature, that's when you're truly your own mainstay.

So find yourself a mainstay. Where can you find it? "I go to the Buddha for refuge." This reverberates throughout the heart and nowhere else. "I go to the Dhamma for refuge" reverberates through the heart. "I go to the Sangha for refuge" reverberates through one and the same heart. The heart is their vessel. The Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are all gathered into this one heart because the heart is the most appropriate vessel for all dhammas. Get so that you see this – and especially so that you see that the whole heart is Dhamma in full.

So cleanse your heart. If you can make it gain release at that point, so much the better. You won't have to ask the whereabouts of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha – for you'll have no more doubts. You'll simply look at the knowingness showing its absolute fullness inside you and know that they are all the same.



The Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are all one Dhamma – one single, solid Dhamma.

At the beginning of our practice the heart had no worth, since it was filled with nothing but the excrement of greed, hatred and delusion. By totally washing away that excrement using the principles of the Dhamma, the heart itself becomes pure Dhamma. Once that happens, it's infinitely at ease. Wherever you go, you're at ease. "Nibbana is the ultimate void." Whatever is annihilated in that void, this you'll know. Whatever remains there, this also you'll know. Who can know this better than one without defilements? The Buddha, in saying that Nibbana is the ultimate void, was speaking from his absolute freedom from defilement. He said this from having seen Nibbana. But we haven't seen it yet. No matter how much we repeat his words, we just stay where we are. Investigate so that you truly see it. The saying "Nibbana is the ultimate void" will no longer be a problem, because what is annihilated and what's not will be fully clear to the heart.

"Nibbana is the ultimate happiness." Listen! The ultimate happiness here isn't a feeling of pleasure or happiness. Instead, it's the happiness that comes with the absolute purity of the heart, with no arising or ceasing like our feelings of pleasure and pain. This has nothing to do with the three characteristics of existence. The ultimate happiness as a constant feature of the pure heart has absolutely nothing to do with the three characteristics, nothing at all to do with impermanence, dissatisfaction and not-self – it doesn't change, it always stays just as it is.

The Buddha says Nibbana is constant. What's constant? The pure heart and nothing else; that's what's constant. Get so that you see it, get so that you know.





Birth *and* Death





When people come to me with questions, most are eager to ask this one: Is there a next world after death? This sort of question is not any one person's issue. It's an issue for all of us who are carrying a burden. When people ask a question like that, I ask them in return, "Was there a yesterday? Was there a morning today? Is there a present at this moment?" They admit that there was and is. "Then will there be a tomorrow? A day after tomorrow? A this month? A next month? A this year? A next year, and years after that?"

Things from the past that we remember can be used to make guesses about the future. Even for things that have yet to happen, we can make comparisons with things that have already occurred. The future has to follow the way things have been in the past. For example, yesterday has already occurred, today is occurring. These things follow one after the other. We know this, we remember, we haven't forgotten. This afternoon, this evening, tonight, tomorrow morning: We've already seen that time moves in this sequence. This is definitely the way things have happened, so we accept that this is the way they will continue to be.

Doubts about this world and the next, or about other things concerning us, are forms of self-delusion, which is why these things become big issues, causing endless fuss about rebirth all over the world. "Is there a next world? When people die, are they reborn?" These questions go together, for who is it that takes birth and dies? We ourselves are always dying and being reborn. What comes to this world and then goes to the next world is us. Who else would it be? If it weren't for us wanderers in the round of rebirth, no one would be burdened with these questions.

This is the harm of delusion: we've been through birth so many times before but we fail to remember. It shows in our lives, but we can't catch hold of its causes, of why it has come about. We can't remember what happened. Our daily affairs spin us around in circles, getting us so tangled up that we don't know which way to go. This is why self-delusion causes endless complica-

tions. Being deluded about other things is not so bad, but being deluded about ourselves blocks all the exits. We can't find any way out. The results come right back at us and bring us suffering, because these sorts of doubts are questions which bind us, not questions which set us free. We can have no hope of resolving these doubts unless we seek the answers by practicing meditation.

This is why the Lord Buddha taught us to solve our own problems. But it's essential to do this in the right way. If we do it by guessing or speculating about what's right, we won't succeed. The only way to succeed is to steadily develop goodness as a support for our meditation practice, so that we can begin to unravel our own affairs, which lie in the sphere of meditation. This is what will lead us to a clear understanding that cuts through our doubts, bringing us satisfactory results. We will be able to stop wondering about whether there is death and rebirth, or death and annihilation.

What are our own affairs? The affairs of the heart. The heart is what acts, creating causes and results for itself all the time: pleasure, pain, complications and turmoil. For the most part, it ties itself down more than it helps itself. When we don't force it to go in good ways, the heart reaps trouble as a result. Suffering comes from being agitated and anxious, thinking restlessly from various angles for no worthwhile reason. The results we receive are an important factor in making us pained and unsettled. This is a very difficult matter for those who are deluded about the world and about themselves, who are agitated without being interested in confirming the truth about themselves using the principles of the Dhamma, principles that guarantee the truth. For example, once we die, we must be reborn; as long as the seeds of rebirth are in the heart, we have to continue being reborn repeatedly. It can't be otherwise; we cannot be annihilated at death.

The Buddha teaches us to keep a watch on the instigator. In other words, we should observe our own heart, which causes birth and death. Since we don't understand it, he explains various ways to observe the heart until we can understand the situation and deal with it properly. In particular, he teaches us to meditate, so that the heart – which has no solid footing – will gain enough of

a footing to stand on its feet. In that way, it will gain quiet and calm, free from the distraction and unsteadiness that destroys our peace of mind.

For example, he teaches us to repeat "Buddho, Dhammo, Sangho" or "bones", "hair of the head", "hair of the body" or whatever phrase suits our temperament, being mindful to keep watch over our meditation theme so as not to become forgetful and send the mind elsewhere. Then the mind, which we used to send out to various objects, can stay firmly with its Dhamma-theme: its meditation-word. Our awareness, which used to be scattered among various preoccupations, will now gather into that point – the heart – which is the gathering place of awareness. All the currents of our awareness will converge at the Dhamma-theme we are repeating with interest. This is because the meditation-word becomes more and more an object of clear and conspicuous awareness. Thus at the beginning stages of meditation, the meditation-word is very important.

Once we have seen the intrinsic value of the peace that appears this way, we also see clearly the harm that comes from the agitation of a mind that has no footing to hold to. We know from our own experience the benefits of a peaceful mind and the harm of an agitated mind. The Buddha teaches this as the first step on the path to understanding the affairs of the mind.

We then try to make the mind progressively more settled and calm by repeating the meditation-word, as already mentioned. We keep at it, again and again, until we become adept, until the mind can become still the way we want it. The sense of well-being that arises from a calm mind becomes even more prominent and clear all the time. As soon as the mind becomes still, giving rise to clear and prominent awareness, it at the same time gathers the defilements into a single spot so that we can see them more clearly and more easily observe their behavior – so that we can more easily remove them with the levels of wisdom suited to dealing with crude, intermediate and subtle defilements step by step. Now, concerning defilements, the things that force the mind to be agitated in countless, inconceivable ways: We can't catch sight of what defilement is, what the mind is or what the Dhamma is, until we first have a firm basis of





mental stillness. When the mind gathers in and is still, the defilements gather in and are still as well. When the mind draws into itself, becoming a point on which we can focus, the defilements also enter a restricted range in that same point. They gather in the mind and rarely ever run loose to stir up trouble as they used to before the mind became still.

Once the mind is still so that it can stand on its feet, we are then taught to use our wisdom to investigate, contemplating the various parts of the body in which the defilements hide out. What is the mind interested in? When it isn't quiet, with what does it like to involve itself? While the mind is quiet, it doesn't stir up trouble for itself, but a common habit with us human beings is that once we have gained peace and relaxation, we get lazy. We simply want to lie down and rest. We don't want to probe into the body or the mind with our mindfulness and wisdom for the sake of seeing the truth and removing the various defilements from the heart. We don't like to reflect on the fact that those who have removed the various kinds of defilement that hide out in the body and the mind have done so by using mindfulness and wisdom. As for mental stillness, or samadhi, that's simply a gathering together of the defilements into a restricted range. It doesn't effect a removal of the defilements. Please remember this and take it to heart.



When the mind isn't still, it tends to get entangled with sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations, and to take them as issues for stirring itself up. We can know with our mindfulness and wisdom which of the various sights, sounds, etc., the mind tends to favor most strongly. While we are investigating, we can know with mindfulness and wisdom which objects the mind likes to get involved with. We can observe the affairs of the mind because of its stillness. As soon as it begins to head out toward its various preoccupations, we know. This is why we are taught to investigate things with our wisdom so as to know what the mind tends to involve itself with. Try to observe so as to know, so as to see clearly with mindfulness and wisdom while you are investigating. Only when you are stilling the mind in samadhi is there no need for you to investigate, because samadhi and wisdom take turns working at different times, each in their own way.

When you are investigating visual objects, with which visual object is your mind most involved? What is the reason? Look at the object. Dissect it. Analyze it into its parts so as to see it clearly for what it truly is. Once you have dissected the object – whatever it is – so as to see it with wisdom in line with its truth, you will see the absurdity and the deceptiveness of the mind that misconstrues things in all kinds of ways without any real reason, without any basis in fact.

Once you have investigated carefully, you'll see that the object has none of the worth assigned to it by the mind. The mind's assumptions have simply fallen for the object, that's all. Once you have investigated, separating the various parts of the body so as to see them in detail, you won't see anything worthwhile or substantial at all. The heart of its own accord will see the harmfulness of its assumptions and attachments. The more it investigates, the more clearly it sees – not only the various sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations, but also the acts of the mind involved with those objects – until it fully knows and clearly sees with wisdom, because it has been constantly unraveling things both within and without. You fully know and clearly see the mind's actions, knowing that they come about for this reason and that, all of which are thoroughly absurd.

Before, you didn't know why the mind was so involved. But now you know clearly that it is involved because of delusion and mistaken assumptions. When you investigate in line with the truth and see the true nature of external things, you know clearly within yourself that the mind has construed phenomena to be like this and like that, which is why it has continually developed more and more attachment and clinging, more and more of the defilements of love and hatred. The mind then realizes its own absurdity.

When the heart realizes that it has been deluded, it withdraws inward, because if it were to continue to think of becoming attached to those things, it would get cut right through by wisdom – so what would it gain from becoming attached? To investigate so as to know clearly that this is this, and that is that, in line with the truth of every individual thing of every sort: This is the way to unravel the great mass of problems that, taken together, are the mass of suffering inside the heart.

As wisdom constantly keeps unraveling things without letup until it understands clearly and distinctly, we don't have to tell the mind to let go. Once the mind knows, it is bound to let go of its own accord. The clinging mind is the mind that doesn't yet know, doesn't yet understand with wisdom. Once it does know, it fully lets go, with no concern or regrets. All the concerns that used to disturb the mind vanish of their own accord because the mind sees right

through them. Once it sees everything clearly and distinctly, what is there left to grope for?

The next step is to investigate the mind, the gathering point of subtle defilements, so as to see what it is looking for when it flows out. Where does it flow from? What pressures the mind into forming thoughts? When mindfulness and wisdom can keep up with thoughts, these thoughts vanish immediately without amounting to anything, without forming issues to entangle us as they did before. This is because mindfulness and wisdom are wise to them, and always ready to herd them in and wipe them out as they keep following the tracks of the origin of defilement to see exactly where it is. Where do its children and grandchildren – the defilements – come from? Animals have their parents, what are the parents of these defilements? Where are they? Why do they keep forming again and again, thinking again and again? Why do they give rise to assumptions and interpretations, increasing pain and suffering without end?

Actually, thoughts are formed at the mind. They don't form anywhere else. So investigate, following them in, step by step, without losing the trail that will lead you to the truth. This is genuine exploration, observing the affairs of all the defilements, using the power of genuine mindfulness and wisdom. Ultimately you will know what the mind is lacking, what it is still connected with, what it is interested in, what it wants to know and to see.

So we follow the connections on in. Day by day, the defilements become more and more restricted. This is because the bridges that connect them to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and the various things of the world in general have been cut away from the mind by using continuous mindfulness and wisdom to the point where we have no more doubts. It's as though the outside world doesn't exist. There remain only the preoccupations that form – blip, blip, blip – in the mind. This is where the rebellious monarch lies. The one who concocts and creates, the one who struggles and writhes restlessly, lies right here.





Before, we didn't know in what ways the mind was writhing. All we knew were the unsatisfactory results that appeared, giving us nothing but pain and suffering, which no one in the world wants. Our heart was so burdened with suffering that it couldn't find a way out, because it had no inkling of how to remedy things. But now that we know, we see more and more clearly into the heart where delusion is the major player. Delusion can't find anything to latch onto outside, so it simply acts inside. Why doesn't it latch on? Because mindfulness and wisdom understand and have it surrounded. So how could it latch onto anything? We now see it more clearly and focus our investigation on it, scratch away at it, dig away at it with mindfulness and wisdom until we have it surrounded every time the heart makes a move. There are no longer any lapses in alertness as there were in the first stages when mindfulness and wisdom were still stumbling and crawling along.

Our persistence at this level is no longer a matter of every activity. It becomes a matter of every mental moment in which the mind ripples. Mindfulness and wisdom have to know both when the rippling comes out and when it vanishes – so no issues can arise in the moment the mind is fashioning a thought, an assumption or an interpretation. This is possible because our super-fast mindfulness and wisdom can keep up with everything. As soon as a rip-

pling occurs, we know. When we know, it vanishes. No issues arise in between. They vanish the moment they appear. They can't branch out anywhere because the bridges to outside matters have been cut by mindfulness and wisdom.

When mindfulness and wisdom are exploring earnestly, relentlessly, unflaggingly, they want to know and to destroy whatever is hazardous. "What causes us to take birth? What leads us to wander in the round of rebirth? What are the causes and conditions that connect things?" This is called scratching away with mindfulness and wisdom, digging away at the heart of delusion. There is no way we can escape knowing and severing the important cause that creates pain and suffering for all living beings: namely, the defilement of delusion that has infiltrated the heart in an insidious way. Such is the power of mindfulness, wisdom, conviction and persistence at the advanced level; something we never imagined could be possible.

The defilements begin to reveal themselves now because they have no place to hide. Since the bridges have been cut, they no longer have the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations in which they used to hole up. Their only hideout is in the heart: The heart is delusion's hideout. When wisdom ransacks through the heart until everything is completely smashed so that nothing remains, ultimately the supreme defilement of delusion – the emperor of the round of rebirth – is completely obliterated from the heart. At this point, how can we help but know what it is that causes birth on this or that level? As for where we will or won't be reborn, that's not important. What's important is seeing clearly that this is what causes birth and death to occur.

This is how we prove whether death is followed by rebirth or by annihilation. We have to prove it in the heart by practicing in line with the principles of mental development, in the same way the Buddha and his Noble Disciples practiced and knew so that it was clear to their hearts. There is no other way to know. Don't go groping and guessing, like scratching at fleas. You'll end up all mangy and dirty, without gaining anything at all. When we reach this point, it's called eliminating birth – whose primary seeds lie within – completely from the heart. From this moment onward, there is nothing that can ever again connect

and branch out. Mindfulness and wisdom on the level of Dhamma-realization know this completely.

Delusion is the culprit who asks, "Is there a next world?" This is the one who reserves a place in the next world, the one who reserved our place in past worlds, the one who has been born and has died over and over and over again, unceasingly and relentlessly to the point where it can't remember the births, the deaths, the pleasures, the pains, the sufferings large and small in its various lives. This is the one.

So please remember its face well. Probe and slash at it until it's destroyed. Don't show it any mercy: You'll simply be feeding and fattening it for it to come back and destroy you.

When we gather the defilements, they converge into the heart. They gather here, and we destroy them right here. Once we have finished destroying them so that nothing is left, the questions about birth, death and the pain and suffering that result from birth and death no longer exist. We can know this clearly for ourselves in a way that is immediately apparent.

There is no more problem about whether or not there is a next world. Our past worlds, we have already abandoned. As for the next world, the bridges have all collapsed. And as for the present, we're wise to it. There are no conventions, no matter how refined, left in the mind. This is truly a mind with no more problems. Once they are all solved here, there will never be any problems again.

The Lord Buddha solved the problem right here. His Arahant disciples solved it right here – knew it right here, severed it completely right here. The proclamation that the Teacher was completely free of pain and suffering, that he was the foremost teacher of the world, came from this knowledge and this freedom from issues. Our study of the world is completed right here at the heart. Our study of the Dhamma reaches full completion right here.

The "world" means the world of living beings. "Living beings" means those who are caught up at the heart. This is where we cut through the problem. This

is where we study and know. The Arahant disciples studied and knew right here with their full hearts – and that was the end of the problem. They solved the problem, and it fell away with nothing remaining.

But as for us, we take on the whole thing: the entire heap of pain and suffering. We take on all problems, but we aren't willing to solve them. We simply hoard them to weigh ourselves down all the time. Our heart is thus filled with a heap of suffering that nothing else can equal, because nothing else is as heavy as a heart heaped with pain. Carrying this heap of problems is heavy on the heart because we haven't completed our studies. We carry nothing but this heap because of our delusion.

When true knowledge appears and eradicates all the hazards from the heart, this is what it means to "graduate" in line with natural principles, with no conferring of degrees or titles that would cause us to become even more deluded. Completing our study of the Dhamma means that we have totally erased all delusion from the heart, with no traces remaining.

At that moment, the three levels of existence – the levels of sensuality, form and formlessness – are no longer a problem, because they all lie in the heart. The level of sensuality is a heart composed of sensuality. The levels of form and formlessness are the conventions of those realms buried in the heart. When the heart removes them, that's the end of the problem. When we solve the problem, this is where we solve it. This world and the next world lie right here, because that which steps into any world lies right here. This heart is what steps out to receive suffering. The motor, the propeller, lies here in the heart and nowhere else.

The Lord Buddha thus taught at the right point, the most appropriate point: the heart, which is the primary culprit. Where do the things I have mentioned here lie if not with each of us? And if we don't solve them right here, where will we solve them?

Living beings are reborn in various realms of existence through the power of the good and bad kamma within the heart. The heart itself is what's reborn

into those realms. If we don't solve the problem right in the heart, we'll never be able to escape the bonfires of suffering and anxiety. If we solve the problem right there, it doesn't matter where the fires are, because we can keep ourselves protected. That's all there is to it!

Whatever problems arise, they arise right here. "Is death followed by rebirth? By annihilation? Is there a next world? Does hell exist? Does heaven? Does evil exist? Does merit?" Everywhere I go, there's the same question: "Do heaven and hell exist?" I never feel like answering. I don't see any reason to answer it, because that which is burdened with heaven and hell is the heart, which everyone already has. So why waste time answering? After all, I'm not a record-keeper for heaven and hell!

Straighten things out right here at the cause that will lead to heaven and hell. Straighten out the bad causes and foster the good ones. When we straighten things out correctly, suffering will not bother us. And how can we miss? The well-taught Dhamma teaches us to solve things right on target, not off-target. Where will we solve things if we don't solve them at the heart? The big problems lie solely at the heart, at this awareness. Crudeness is a matter of this awareness. Refinement is a matter of this awareness. That which makes people crude or refined is this awareness, with defilements as the reinforcement. If the heart becomes refined, it's be-









cause goodness is the reinforcement, making it refined until it goes beyond the final point of refinement, beyond the final point of conventions, and ends up gaining release from all suffering, with no seeds for any further connections.

Another question that people are always asking is how to overcome laziness. If we were to tell them to use laziness to overcome laziness, it would be tantamount to telling them to become an enemy of beds, blankets and pillows by sleeping without ever waking up. It would be as if they were already dead, because laziness makes you weak and listless like a person ready to die. How can you use laziness to cure laziness? Once you get a nice resting place as a means of lulling you to drown in sleep, it's as if you were already dead – dead right there on the pillow! Even when you wake up, you don't want to get up, because laziness stomps all over you, forcing you to stay prone. This is how it goes when you use laziness to cure laziness.

If you use energy and persistence to cure laziness, then you get right up, ready to fight. If there's a fight, you have hope of winning. But if you simply lie prostrate, all you can do is lose – although whether we should call it losing or something else is hard to say, because you don't even put up a fight at all, so how can you say that you lose? If there's a fight and you can't win, then you can say that this person wins and that person loses. But here there's no fight at all! You simply lie there wallowing. If you don't call this being a servant in the house of defilements what would you call it? Because that's what it is: being a servant in their house. If you use laziness to cure the defilements, you end up piling on even more defilements. Or what would you say? As things stand, the defilements already fill the heart, so if you foster them even more, where are you going to put them? You've got only one heart! The only way is to remove the defilements so that you can begin to breathe, and not let them sit on top of your nose so that you can never gasp a breath at all.

Persistence. Diligence. Exertion in the way of reason that can accomplish our purposes: This is the path that sages have followed. Even though it may be difficult, we're up to the fight. It's like removing a thorn from your foot: Even though it hurts to remove it, you have to bear it. If you let it stay there, your

whole foot will become infected. You won't be able to walk at all, and you may even lose your foot. So there's only one reasonable course: Pull it out. No matter how much it hurts, you have to bear it, because you have to get the thing out! This is a line of reasoning you have to accept. Once the thorn is out, it holds no more poison. Put medicine on the wound, and the foot will heal without flaring up as it would if the thorn were still embedded there.

Defilement is just like a thorn. We let it lie buried forever in the heart. As long as it remains, the heart is constantly infected. Is this what you want? To be a putrid person? Ask yourself. Don't ask the defilements. They'll simply do you more harm. If you don't want this, you have to fight them. Once you fight them, you are sure of somehow finding a way to win. No matter how many times you lose, there will have to come a time when you win. Once you've won, then you can keep on winning and winning until there is nothing left for you to fight because the defilements are completely destroyed.

When you win, what do you defeat? You defeat laziness with diligence. You defeat defilements with energy and persistence. This way you gain release from all suffering. This is how you solve the problem of birth and death, right at the heart. There is only this spot that most needs solving. It's the most appropriate spot, the most correct spot to solve. There is no way you can solve them anywhere else. Keep on making assumptions and interpretations for eons and eons, and you'll simply continue to be burdened with the problem as it leads you to more birth, death, pain and suffering.

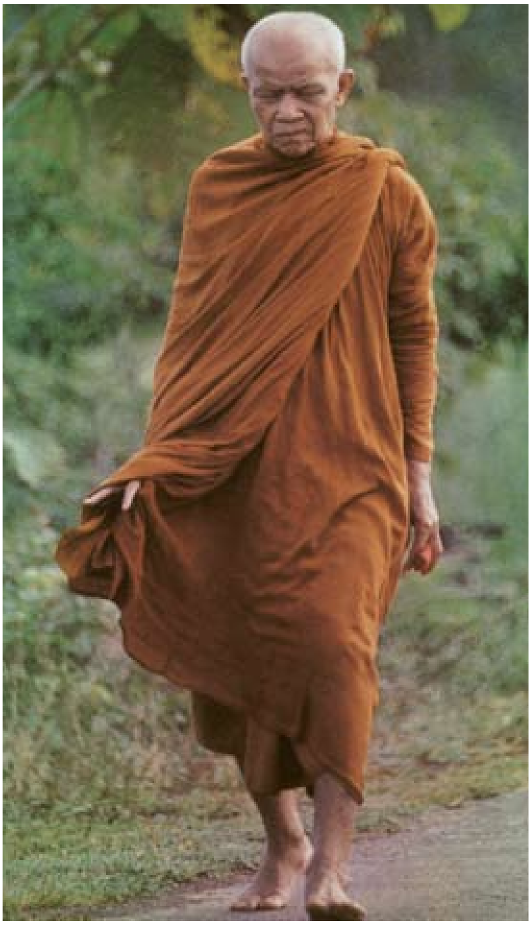
"Does suffering exist, or not? Do merit and evil exist, or not?" Actually, all of us without exception experience these things. "Evil" is mental darkness and suffering. "Merit" is well-being and ease. These things exist in the body and mind of every person, so how can you deny them? "Merit" is a name for well-being. The Buddha calls it merit. Suffering he calls evil. We are touched by good and evil all the time. Whether we live in this world or the next, we can't help but meet with good and evil.



Hell or not-hell, if there's pain filling the body and the mind, who wants it? Who wants to meet with it? This is something we all know, so why ask about hell when it's already with us like this? Wherever pain is burning us, it's as hot as being branded with fire. No matter where you're branded, it is hot in the same way. You can call it hell or not-hell as you like, but nobody wants it, because pain is something we have all known for ourselves.

And where are you going to look for heaven? When you meet with the well-being that comes from practicing the Dhamma – and especially with well-being in the heart, beginning with stillness and calm in ascending stages to the point where the heart develops a firm and solid footing within, so that it is sure of itself; and then further, to the point where you gain release – then where are you going to ask about heaven and Nibbana? There's no need to ask. You know them directly with your heart. You are the owner, in charge of the heart that is clearly the instigator, so where else are you going to look for the names "heaven" and "hell"? What is there to grope for?

You've got the real thing within you. That's all that matters. The Dhamma of the Lord Buddha doesn't delude people into groping for this or that. So take hold of the real thing right here.



from Ignorance *to* Emptiness








I'd like to take the opportunity to tell you about my own ignorance and doubts, with the realization that we all come from the land of ignorance and doubt in as much as our parents and their ancestors were born with defilements that led them to ignorance as well. There's probably not one of us here who slipped through to be born in the land of intelligence and freedom from doubt. This being the case, we must all be subject to doubts. Each of us, before starting the practice and in the beginning stages of the practice, is sure to suffer from ignorance and doubt, as these are the factors that lead to the states of becoming and birth into which all living beings are born. When we lay the groundwork for practice, we don't have enough starting capital for intelligence to take the lead in every situation, so ignorance is sure to find an opening to take the lead. If we have never trained our intelligence to show us the way, the ignorance that holds the upper hand in the heart is sure to drag us in the wrong direction as a matter of course.

In the beginning of my own training, I felt doubts about whether the teachings of the Buddha – both the practices to be followed and the results to be obtained – were as complete as he said they were. This was an uncertainty that ran deep in my heart during the period in which I was debating whether or not to practice for the really high levels of Dhamma – or, to put it succinctly, for the sake of Nibbana. Before I considered practicing for the sake of Nibbana, these doubts hardly ever occurred to me, probably because I hadn't yet aimed my compass in that direction. But after I ordained and studied the Dhamma – and especially the life of the Buddha, which was the story of his great renunciation leading to his attainment of the paths, the fruitions and Nibbana; and then the lives of the Noble Disciples who, having heard the Dhamma from the Buddha, went off to practice in various places until they too gained Enlightenment, becoming witnesses to the truth of the Buddha and his teachings – when I had studied to this point, I felt a sense of faith and conviction and wanted to train myself to be like them.

But how was I to follow the training that would make me like them? Would the training – in other words, the practice that would lead the heart to awaken to the higher levels of Dhamma like the Buddha and his disciples – still produce the same sort of results, or would it be fruitless and merely lead to pointless hardship for those who practiced it? Would it still give the full results in line with the Buddha's well-taught teachings? That was my primary doubt. But as for believing in the Buddha's Enlightenment and that of his disciples, of this I was fully convinced, as far as an ordinary person can be. The thing that formed a stumbling block for me in the beginning stages was doubt as to whether or not the path of practice I would take, following the Buddha and his disciples, would lead me to the same point they had reached. Perhaps it was now overgrown with brambles and thorns. Had it changed into something other than the Dhamma that leads away from suffering, even though the Buddha and his disciples had all followed this very same path to the land of peace and security? This was my doubt concerning causes in the practice. As for the results of the practice, I wondered whether the paths, the fruitions and Nibbana still existed as they had in the time of the Buddha. Although they ran deep in my heart, I couldn't tell these doubts to anyone else because I felt no one could resolve them for me and dispel them from my heart.

That is why I had my hopes constantly set on meeting Venerable Ajaan Mun. Even though I had never met him before, I had heard that he was a monk of great distinction. By and large, the people who told me about him never spoke of him in terms of the ordinary levels of noble attainments. They all spoke of his Arahantship. This convinced me that when I finished my studies in line with a vow I had made, I'd have to make the effort to find him and live under his guidance so as to cut away the doubts running deep in my heart at that time.

I had promised myself that I would complete the third grade of Pali studies first. As soon as I passed the third-level Pali exams, I set out from Bangkok to honor that vow. I got as far as Nakhon Ratchasima, where I spent the rains retreat in Cakkaraad District. I started practicing for samadhi concentration and was amazed at how my mind developed stillness and calm step by step. I could

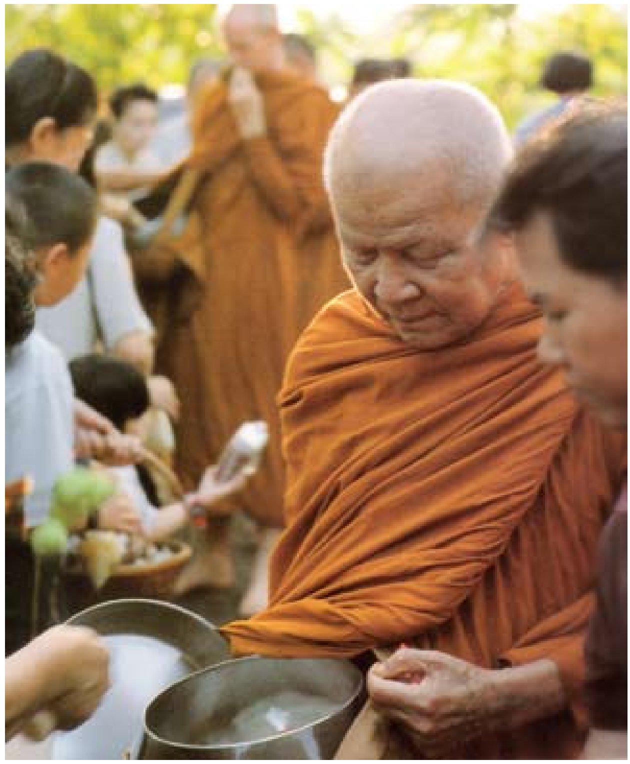
clearly see my heart settle down in peace. Soon after that, the senior monk who was my Pali teacher asked me to return to Bangkok to continue my studies. He even had the kindness to come after me, before continuing to travel further out into the provinces. On the way back, he was going to have me accompany him to Bangkok. I really felt in a bind, so I headed for Udon Thani in order to find Venerable Ajaan Mun. Along the way, the progress I had made in samadhi practice disappeared. I stopped at my home village of Baan Taad to make a simple umbrella-tent, and that was my undoing. I hadn't even spent a full month at Baan Taad when I began to feel that my mind wasn't settling down in samadhi as snugly as it had before. Sometimes I could get it to settle down, sometimes not. Seeing that things didn't look promising and that I could only lose by staying on, I quickly left.

In coming from Nakhon Ratchasima to Udon Thani, my purpose had been to catch up with Venerable Ajaan Mun, who had spent the rains at Wat Noan Nives, Udon Thani. I didn't reach him in time though, because he had been invited to Sakon Nakhon before my arrival, so I went on to stay at Wat Thung Sawaang in Nong Khai for a little more than three months. In May of that year, 1942, I left Nong Khai for the town of Sakon Nakhon, and from there went on to the monastery where Venerable Ajaan Mun was staying at Baan Khoak, Tong Khoam Township, Muang District, Sakon Nakhon Province. When I reached the monastery, I found him doing walking meditation in the late evening dusk. "Who's that?" he asked, so I told him who I was. He then left his meditation path and went to the meeting hall – he was staying in a room there in the meeting hall – and conversed with me, showing a great deal of kindness and compassion for the incredibly ignorant person who had come to seek him out. He gave me a sermon that first evening, the gist of which I'll relate to you as far as I can remember it. It's a message that remains close to my heart to this day.

"You've already studied a good deal," he told me, "at least enough to earn the title of Maha. Now I'm going to tell you something that I want you take and consider. Don't imagine that I underrate the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha, but at present no matter how much of the Dhamma you've studied, it will serve no



purpose other than simply being an obstacle to your meditation, because you won't be able to resist dwelling on it and using it to take the measure of things when you're trying to calm your heart. So for the sake of developing stillness in your heart, I want you to put away the Dhamma you've studied for the time being. When the time comes for it to benefit you, it will all come streaming in to blend perfectly with your practice. At the same time, it will serve as a standard to which you should make the heart conform. But for the time being, I don't want you to concern yourself with the Dhamma you've studied at all. When you make the mind still or investigate with wisdom, I want you first to restrict yourself to the sphere of the body. All of the Dhamma in the texts points to the body and the mind, but the mind doesn't yet have any firm evidence and so it can't take the Dhamma learned from the texts and put it to good use. Your mind is fixated on theory in a manner that doesn't truly reflect the way of the Lord Buddha. The Dhamma will be compared with the theory you've memorized, leading you to speculate to the point where you become a person with no solid foundation. I want you to take what I've said and think it over. If you set your

mind on the practice without retreating, the day will come when these words of mine will impress themselves on your heart."

I felt an immediate sense of faith and conviction in Venerable Ajaan Mun as soon as I saw him face to face that night, both because of my conviction in the Dhamma he was so kind to teach me and because of the assistance he gave in letting me stay under his guidance. When staying with him, I felt a sense of contentment hard to describe – but also with a stupidity on my own part hard to describe as well. He himself was very kind, helping me with Dhamma every time I went to see him.

When I first went to stay with Venerable Ajaan Mun, my meditation practice was constantly up and down. For a long time my heart was reluctant to settle down firmly. The first rains I spent with him was my ninth rains, inasmuch as I had spent my first seven rains in study, and one rains in Nakhon Ratchasima after starting to practice. During that first rains with Venerable Ajaan Mun, there

was nothing but progress and decline in my samadhi. After the rains, I went to stay on a mountain for more than two months and then returned to him with my mind still up and down in the same way. I couldn't figure out why it kept regressing even though I was intent on practicing to the full extent of my ability. Some nights, I was unable to sleep all night long out of fear that my mental state would deteriorate, and yet it would still manage to do so. Especially when the mind was beginning to settle down in stillness, I'd accelerate my efforts even more, out of fear that it would regress as it had before – and even then it would regress on me. After a while it would progress again only to decline again. When it was up, it would stay at that level for only three days and then slip back right before my eyes. This disturbed me and made me wonder: What caused it to slip back? Was it because I had let go of my meditation object? Perhaps my mindfulness had lapsed at that point. So I made a note of this and promised myself that no matter what, I would have to keep my mind focused on the meditation object at all times. Regardless of where I went and regardless of whether I was in or out of samadhi – even when I was sweeping the monastery compound or doing any of my chores – I would not allow my mind to slip away from Buddho, the word I liked to repeat as my meditation object.

Even when the mind settled down into stillness, as long as I could continue to think of the meditation-word Buddho, I wouldn't let go of it. If the mind was going to regress in any way, this was where I would know it. Having taken note of this point and made my promise, I started repeating the word Buddho. While I was repeating it, the mind settled down quickly, much more quickly than it had before. It would drop the meditation-word only when it had settled snugly into stillness. At that moment, whether thinking Buddho or not, the awareness of that stillness was in and of itself solidly 'Buddho'. At the point where the mind formed no thoughts at all, the repetition of Buddho would stop. As soon as the mind made a move to withdraw – in other words, as soon as it rippled slightly – I'd immediately start pumping the meditation-word back in again as a means of keeping the mind in place.

I abandoned my concern for the progress or decline of the mind. No matter what, I wasn't willing to let go of my meditation-word. I felt no more concern for how the mind might fluctuate. I simply forced it to be conscious of Buddho. I became aware of my progress only in terms of the heart that had Buddho in charge. That's how I would know. That's the one spot where I'd place my confidence. I wouldn't have to concern myself with anything else.

As time passed, the mind that had once progressed and regressed ceased to slide back. This was what made me realize that the reason the mind had kept regressing so often was because of a lapse in its meditation-word; mindfulness must have slipped away at that moment for sure. So from that point on, I kept my meditation-word continually in place. No matter where I went or where I stayed, I would not let mindfulness lapse. Even should I be on the verge of death, I would never let mindfulness slip away from Buddho. If the mind was going to regress, this was the only place where I'd try to know it. I wouldn't concern myself with the matter in any other way. As a result, the mind was able to establish a foundation for itself by focusing exclusively on the meditation-word Buddho.

After that came my second rains retreat with Venerable Ajaan Mun. Before the rains began, my mind felt still and firm in samadhi, with no regression at all. Even then, I refused to let go of my meditation-word. I kept this up until I was able to sit in meditation without changing my posture from early evening until the first light of dawn.

During my second rains with Venerable Ajaan Mun, I considered sitting in meditation from dusk until dawn as more important than any other method in my practice. After that I gradually eased off, as I came to see the body as a tool that could wear out if I used it without any sense of moderation. Still, I found that accelerating my efforts by means of sitting all night until dawn gave more energy to the heart than any other method.

While I was sitting from dusk until dawn, I gained a clear comprehension of the feelings of pain that arise from sitting in meditation for long periods of

time, because the pain that arose at that time was strange and exceptional in many ways. The wisdom that I used to investigate so as to contend with the pain kept at its work without flagging, until it was able to understand the nature of every sort of pain in the body – which, after many hours of sitting, became a solid mass of pain. At the same time, wisdom was able to penetrate deeply to know the feelings of the heart. This practice did a great deal to strengthen my mindfulness, my discernment and my courage in meditation. At the same time, it made me bold and confident with regard to the future, in that the pains that would appear at the approach of death would be no different from the pains I was experiencing and investigating in the present. Nothing about the pain of death would be so different or exceptional as to deceive or confuse me at the time of death. This was a further realization. As soon as wisdom had fully comprehended the pain, the pain disappeared instantly, and the mind settled down into total stillness.

When the mind settles down into total stillness, you could say that the mind is empty, but it's only empty in samadhi. When the mind withdraws from samadhi, the emptiness disappears. From there, the mind resumes its investigations and continues with them until it gains expertise in the proper use of samadhi. Once samadhi is strong, wisdom steps up its investigation of the various aspects of the body until it sees them all clearly and can remove its attachments concerning the body once and for all. At that point, the mind begins to be progressively more empty, but it doesn't yet display a complete emptiness. As long as it hasn't gained total proficiency, images will still appear within it as mental pictures. The images within the heart then begin to fade day by day, until finally they are gone. No mental images appear either inside or outside the heart. This is called an empty mind.

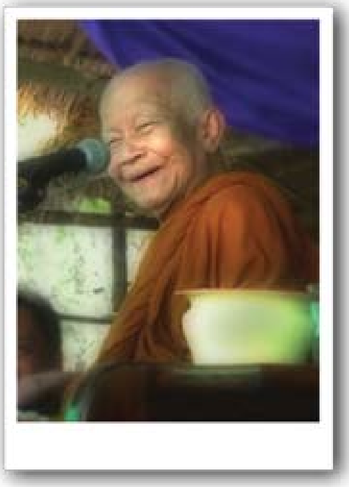
This kind of emptiness is the inherent emptiness of the mind that has reached its own level. It's not the same as the emptiness of samadhi. The emptiness of samadhi lasts only as long as we sit in samadhi. But, when the mind lets go of the body, because of the power of its mindfulness and wisdom that are



fully alert to the internal images, this is called the emptiness of the mind on its own level. This emptiness, gained through wisdom, is lasting.

When this stage is reached, the mind is truly empty. Even though the body appears, there's simply a sense that the body is there. No image of the body appears in the mind at all. Emptiness of this sort is said to be empty on the level of the mind – and it's constantly empty like this at all times. If this emptiness is Nibbana, it's the Nibbana of that particular meditator or of that stage of the mind, but it's not yet the Nibbana of the Buddha. If someone were to take the emptiness of samadhi for Nibbana, it would simply be the Nibbana of that particular meditator's samadhi. Why is it that these two sorts of emptiness aren't the emptiness of the Buddha's Nibbana? Because the mind empty in samadhi is unavoidably satisfied with and attached to its samadhi. The mind empty in line with its own level is likewise unavoidably absorbed in and attached to that sort of emptiness. The mind must then take that level of emptiness as its object until it passes beyond it. Anyone who calls this emptiness Nibbana is actually attached to this emptiness without realizing it. When attachment is involved, how can this sort of emptiness be Nibbana?

If we don't want to settle for this level of Nibbana, we must take a thorough look at feeling, memory, thought and consciousness until we see them clearly and in full detail – because the emptiness we're referring to is the emptiness of feeling, in that a feeling of pleasure fills this emptiness. Memory recognizes it as empty. Thoughts take this emptiness as their preoccupation. Consciousness is aware of an internal emptiness. So this level of emptiness becomes the emptiness of the mind's preoccupation.



If we investigate this emptiness, seeing it clearly as a mental fabrication, we will open the way by which we are sure of transcending it someday. Investigating in this way, the truth of the mind will gradually reveal itself. The mind is then sure to find a way to shake itself free. Even the underlying basis for these fabricated things will not be able to withstand mindfulness and wisdom. Mindfulness and wisdom of a radical sort will slash their way in – just like a fire that burns without stopping when it meets with fuel – until they have dug up the roots of all conditioned things. Only then will they stop their advance.

On this level, the adversaries to the Nibbana of the Buddha are the things to which the mind is attached: the sense that, "My heart is empty," "My heart is at ease," "My heart is clean and clear." Although we may see the heart as empty, it's paired with a non-emptiness. The heart may seem to be satisfied, but it's merely the other side of dissatisfaction. The heart may seem clean and clear, but it dwells with defilement – without our being aware of it. Thus emptiness, ease and clarity are the qualities that obscure the heart because they are the signs of becoming and birth. Whoever wants to cut off becoming and birth should thus investigate these things with wisdom so as to let them go. Don't be possessive of them, or they will turn into a fire that burns you. When your wisdom digs down into these three lords of becoming as they appear, you will

come to the central hub of becoming and birth, and it will disintegrate from the heart the moment wisdom reaches the foundation on which it is based.

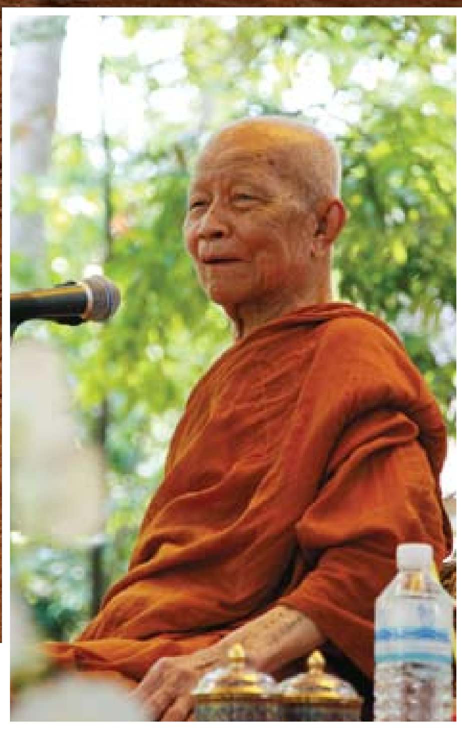
The ultimate form of emptiness arises when those factors are ended through the power of wisdom. No signs of any conventional reality will appear in that emptiness at all. It is an emptiness different from the other forms of emptiness we have passed through. Whether that emptiness can be called the emptiness of the Buddha, or whose emptiness it is, I'm afraid I can't say, other than that it's an emptiness that each meditator can know directly only for him or herself alone.

The ultimate emptiness has no time or season. It's absolutely timeless. The emptiness of samadhi can fluctuate and change. The emptiness of the formless or imageless level, which serves as our path, can change or be transcended. But this emptiness exclusively within oneself doesn't change – because there is no self within this emptiness, and no sense that this emptiness is oneself. There is simply the knowledge and vision of things as they are – seeing this emptiness in line with its natural principles as they actually are, and seeing all phenomena as they actually are. Even moral virtue, samadhi and wisdom – the qualities we use to straighten out the heart – are realized for what they are and let go in line with their true nature. Nothing at all remains lurking in the nature of this final stage of emptiness.

Please reflect on these three kinds of emptiness and try to attain them in your practice. Especially the last form of emptiness, which is emptiness in the principles of nature, beyond the range where any other person or any conventional reality can become involved with it ever again. Our doubts, ranging from the beginning levels of the Dhamma to this ultimate emptiness, will finally be resolved, with our own knowledge and vision acting as judge.









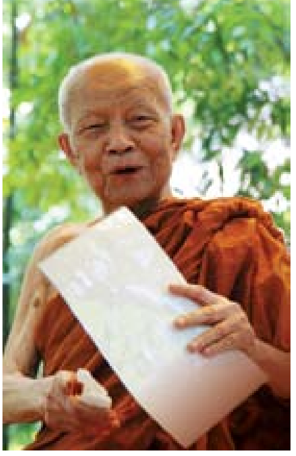
The Middleness *of the* Middle Way











I can tell a resolute person when I see him – like the Venerable Ajaan Mun. It was intimidating just to look at him. How could mental defilements not be intimidated by him? Even we monks were intimidated by him, and the defilements are smarter than we are, so how could they not be intimidated? They had to be intimidated. That's the way things have to be. A teacher who possesses the Dhamma, who possesses virtue, has to be resolute so as to eliminate evil. He must be really resolute. The stronger the evil, the more resolute and strong his goodness has to be. It can't afford not to be resolute and strong. Otherwise, goodness will lose out.

Suppose this place is dirty: However dirty it may be, we can't clean it just by splashing it with a glass of water, can we? We'd have to use a lot of water to make it clean. If this place were filled with a pile of excrement, we'd have to splash it with a whole bucket of water. And not just an ordinary bucket – a great big one. A mighty splash, and all the excrement would be scattered. The place would become clean because the water was stronger. Being resolute means being earnest toward everything of every sort within the bounds of reason. Take this and think it over. If you act weakly when training yourself, you're not on the path. You have to be strong in fighting with the mind's defilements. Don't let the strong defilements step all over you. If we don't have any way of fighting defilements – if we're weak and irresolute – we're not good for much at all.

For those who want what is clean and good from the Dhamma: What is the Dhamma like? What did the Buddha teach? What sort of defilement is eliminated by what sort of Dhamma so that it deserves to be called the Middle Way? The Buddha taught, "The Middle Way realized by the Tathagata – producing vision, producing realization – leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Nibbana." This is in the Discourse on 'Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion'. The Middle Way can cause all these forms of knowledge to arise. Realization is penetrative knowledge that's very subtle and sharp. Self-awakening is even more subtle and sharp than penetrative knowledge.

They all constitute the path leading to Nibbana. All of these things without exception come from the Middle Way. They do not lie beyond the range of the Middle Way at all.

What does the word "middle" mean? Are middleness as it is in reality and middleness we study, memorize and speculate on really so different? Yes, very different. I'll give you an example. Suppose there are two soldiers, both of whom have studied the full course of military science. One of them has never been in the battle lines, while the other has had a lot of experience on the battlefield, to the point where he just barely escaped with his life. Which of the two can speak more accurately and fluently about the reality of fighting in a war? We have to agree without hesitation that the soldier who has been in battle can speak of every facet in line with the events he has seen and encountered, to the extent that he was able to come out alive. If he were stupid, he would have died. He had to have been intelligent in order to survive.

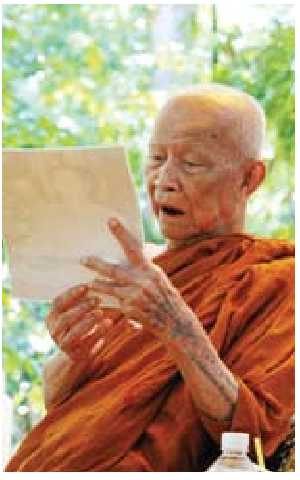
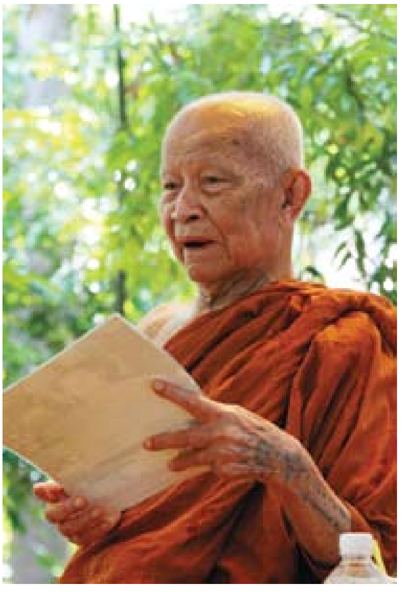
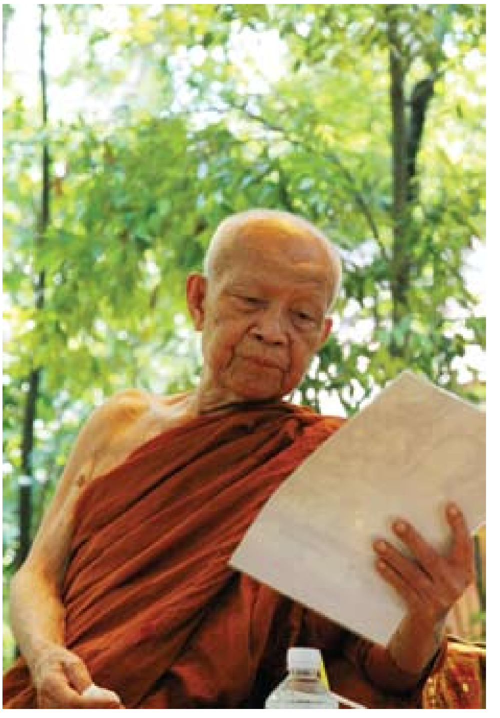
So the Middle Way: How is it "middle"? We've been taught that following the Middle Way means being neither too lax nor too extreme. So how do we make sure that our practice is not too lax or too extreme, so that it's in line with the principle of middleness aimed at by the genuine Dhamma? Perhaps after we sit in meditation for a while, we become afraid that we'll ache, or faint, or die, or our body will be crippled or we'll go crazy. So we tell ourselves, "Our practice is too extreme." Understand? If we think of making a donation, we say, "No. That'd be a waste. We'd do better to use it for this or that." So what is this? Do you understand whose middleness this is? If we're going to follow the way of the Dhamma, we say it's too extreme, but if we're going to follow the way of defilement, we're ready for anything, without a thought for middleness at all. So whose middleness is this? It's just the middleness of the defilements, because the defilements have their middleness too.

When some people do good actions because they desire to go to heaven or desire to attain Nibbana, they worry that this desire is a form of craving. But when they want to go to hell in this very life, they don't worry about whether it's craving or not. They don't even think about it. When they go into a bar: Is

this craving? They don't stop to think about it. When they drink liquor or fool around with the ways to deprivation: Is this the Middle Way or not? Is this craving? Is this defilement or not? They don't bother to think. But when they think of turning to the realm of Dhamma, then their desires become too extreme. Everything becomes too extreme. What is this? Doesn't the thought ever occur to us that these are the opinions of the defilements dragging us along?

The defilements dress things up just fine. Their real middleness is in the middle of the pillow, the middle of the sleeping mat. As soon as we do a little walking meditation and think Buddho, Dhammo, Sangho, it's as if we're being taken to our death, as if we're tied to a leash like a monkey squirming and jumping about until we let go of the Buddho that will lead us to safety. Whether we're going to give alms, observe the precepts or practice meditation, we're afraid that we'll faint and die from the exertion. The defilements are putting up obstacles and blocking our way at every step. We don't realize what the middleness of the defilements is like, because it's been lulling us to sleep all along.

Just now I mentioned the two soldiers who had studied military science, one of whom had gone into battle while the other one hadn't. We can compare this to studying the texts. Those who have gone into battle – who have had experience dealing with defilements by fighting against them – are the ones who can describe the Middle Way correctly and accurately. If you simply study and memorize… Here I'm not belittling study. Study all you can. Memorize all you can. I'm not criticizing memorization. But if you simply memorize the names of the defilements – even if you memorize their entire ancestry – it doesn't mean a thing if you aren't intent on the practice. If you don't practice, it's just like memorizing the names of different criminals. How this or that gang of criminals operates, how it makes its money, what it likes to do, what the members' names are: We can memorize these things. We can even memorize their family tree, but if we don't get into action and deal with them, those criminals whose names we can remember will keep on harming the world. So merely memorizing names doesn't serve any useful purpose. We have to get into action and lay

down a strategy. What kind of places do those criminals usually rob? What are their preferred targets? We then take our strategy and put it into practice, lying in wait for them at this place and that, until we can catch them. Society can then live in peace. This is the realm of the practice.

The same holds true with mental defilements and their outflows. We have to practice in order to deal with them. Once we know their ways, we put that knowledge into practice. What is it like to give alms? We know because we've already given. What is it like to observe the precepts? We've already observed them. What is it like to meditate? We've already done it. This is called practice. It's not that we simply memorize that giving alms has results like that, observing the precepts has results like this, meditation has results like that, heaven is like this, Nibbana is like that. If we simply repeat these things by rote, without being interested in the practice, we won't get to go there, we won't achieve any of the results.

So focus on the practice of fighting the defilements. The defilements have been the enemies of the Dhamma from time immemorial. The Buddha taught that the defilements are the enemies of the Dhamma. Where do they lie? Right here – in the human heart. Where does the Dhamma lie? In the human heart




as well. This is why it's important for human beings to counteract their defilements. In fighting the defilements, we will have to suffer some pain and discomfort as a matter of course. Whatever weapons they use, whatever their mode of attack, whatever their tactics, the Dhamma has to stay focused on its attack. The techniques used in eliminating the defilements, such as sidestepping, jabbing, punching and charging, all have to be in line with the principles of the Dhamma – such as Right Views and Right Attitudes – which circle round and round the enemy. Practicing in this way, we are able to gradually subdue the defilements. This is what is really meant by the Middle Way.

So, go ahead and desire. Desire to gain release from suffering. Desire to gain merit. Desire to go to heaven. Desire to go to Nibbana. Go ahead and desire these results as much as you like, because they're all part of the path. It's not true that all desire is craving. If we don't allow any desires because we think that all desire is craving, then it's as if we were already dead. Nothing is accomplished in life without desire. That's not what it means to eliminate defilements and craving. Such a person is nothing special, nothing special at all, because

he's a dead person. A person who isn't dead has to want this and that – just be careful that you don't go wanting in the wrong direction, that's all. If you want in the wrong direction, it means craving and defilement. If you want in the right direction, it's the path, so make sure you understand this!

The stronger our desire, the more resolute our persistence will be. Desire and determination are part of the path, the way to gain release from suffering. When our desire to go to heaven, to attain Nibbana or to gain release from suffering is strong, making us brave in the fight, then our persistence, our stamina and our fighting spirit are pulled together into a single strength by our intention to attain Nibbana and be released from suffering. These factors keep working constantly with no concern for the time of the day, the month or the year. They simply keep battling all the time.

When the desire gets that strong, meditators must be resolute! No matter how many defilements there are, they'll be made to succumb. We can't afford to retreat. We must remain doggedly determined to destroy the defilements. If they don't collapse first, then we're prepared to retreat if we're no match for them. But the word "surrender" does not exist in the heart. If they kick us out of the ring, we climb right back in to fight again. If they kick us out again, we climb back in again and keep on fighting. After this happens many times, we can start kicking the defilements out of the ring instead. Each time we are kicked and hit, we learn a lesson. Whenever we lose to the defilements, we regroup and counterpunch, using their own tactics to counteract them. Eventually, we'll be able to fend them off.

As the defilements gradually become weaker, matters of Dhamma – mindfulness, samadhi, wisdom and persistence – become stronger and stronger. This is when the defilements have to cower at our feet, because they're no match for the Dhamma. Before, we were the only ones cowering. When we cowered, the defilements beat up on us. Lying down, we'd cry and moan. Sitting, we'd moan. Standing, we'd feel longing. Walking, we'd feel longing and hunger. Wherever we'd go, there would be nothing but love, hate and anger filling the heart. There'd be nothing but defilements stomping all over us. But once those

things are struck down by mindfulness, wisdom, conviction and persistence, they no longer arise no matter where we go – because the defilements are the ones cowering. As they keep on cowering, we continue probing for them without letup. When we find one, we kill it. When we find another one, we kill it; until the defilements are completely eradicated, with nothing left to disturb the heart.

After that, when we talk about defilements, no matter what kind, we can talk with assurance. Whatever tricks and tactics we've employed to shed the defilements, we can describe them without hesitation. The purity of the heart that has no more defilements ruining it as before, we can describe with certainty. This is like the person who has gone into battle and can speak about the experience without hesitation. It's not the same as when we simply memorize. If we simply memorize, we can speak only in line with the texts. We can't elaborate the least little bit. We don't know how.

But a person who has gone into battle knows all the ins and outs – not merely the military science of how to do things in battle. He understands the situation from every angle and can navigate every circumstance skillfully, focusing on what actions are needed to reach safety or to gain victory. A fighter uses whatever means is necessary. It's the same with us when we fight the defilements. Whatever tactics are needed to win, the Buddha has provided all the necessary weapons of Dhamma for us to activate with our own mindfulness and wisdom. True practitioners never run out of rope, you know. When we really come to the end of our rope, then mindfulness and wisdom produce ways for us to help ourselves so that we can continue to bash the defilements to bits, until no more are left. From that point on, wherever the defilements bring in their armies, in whatever form, we know them all – because they've been entirely eliminated from our hearts.

This is the practice of the Middle Way. When the defilements come charging in, the Middle Way goes charging out to meet them. If they bring in a big army, the Middle Way fights them off with a big army. If they're hard-hitting, we're hard-hitting. If they're daredevils, we're daredevils. This is what's meant

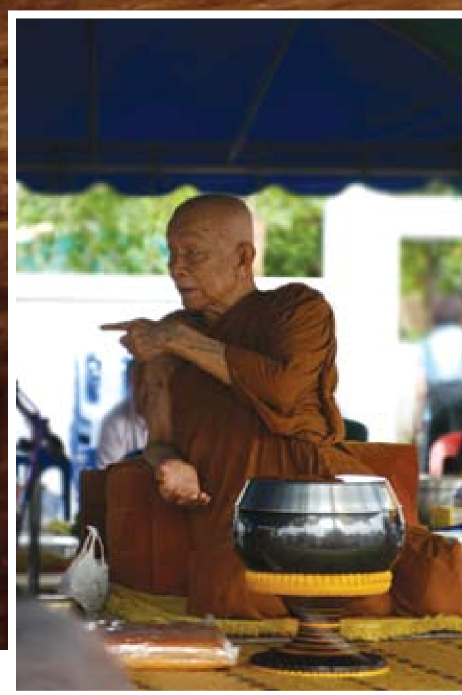
by the Middle Way: the appropriate way for defeating the army of the enemy. If their army is large while ours is small and our efforts few, it just won't work. We're bound to lose. However large their army and however many their weapons, our army must be larger and our weapons superior. Only then will we win. This is known as the army of Dhamma. However large the defiling army may be, mindfulness, wisdom, conviction and persistence have to charge in and treat them with a heavy hand. Finally, the defilements will be laid out cold, and there'll be no need to chant a funeral service for them. We will have finally gained the superlative Dhamma.

The Dhamma is sanditthiko – directly visible. The teachings of the Buddha are an open market of the paths, the fruitions and Nibbana, which are never out of date – unless we ourselves are out of date. Only then will we let the defilements fool us into thinking that the Dhamma is out of date; that people who enter monasteries and practice the Dhamma are old-fashioned and out of date; that the teachings of the religion have no paths or fruitions; that the paths, the fruitions and Nibbana no longer exist; that no matter how much you practice, you'll just wear yourself out in vain. These attitudes are nothing but the defilements deceiving us – and we believe everything they tell us, keeping us continually bankrupt without even a scrap of goodness to our name.

For that reason, we must be resolute in our desire to see the truth. It's there in the heart of every person. The Buddha did not lay any exclusive claims to it. All that's needed is that we practice. Don't doubt the truth of the paths, the fruitions and Nibbana. When have the defilements ever been out of date? They're fashionable in our hearts at all times. Why are they never accused of being old-fashioned? We never even give a thought to criticizing them. And how is it that the Dhamma, which is the remedy for the defilements, has seemingly vanished? The Dhamma is a pair with defilements; they exist together in the heart. But the defilements just lull us to sleep so that we won't use the Dhamma to defeat them. They're afraid of losing their power – because defilements are intimidated by Dhamma, which is why they deceive us into ignoring its presence. Take this to heart and remember it well.









An Heir *to the* Dhamma





When the ordinary mind that doesn't yet have any standards meets up with things that drag it in the wrong direction, it will tend to go rolling after such preoccupations without letup, to the point where it can't find any foundation for sustaining its peace and calm. In terms of the Dhamma, these preoccupations are called defilements.

We can see this when we begin to practice. Because the defilements are strong, the mind stumbles and crawls along, not at all willing to follow the way of Dhamma. This is something I haven't forgotten, from the time I first set out to practice up until now, because it's a truth that lies embedded in the heart.

When I first began to meditate, my practice lacked a solid foundation. Since I had yet to discover the right method to look after my mind, my practice was in a state of constant flux. It would make steady progress for awhile only to decline rapidly. My practice continued to deteriorate, but I didn't know how to reverse the decline. So I thought long and hard, trying to find a firm basis on which I could stabilize my mind. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that mindfulness had deserted me because my fundamentals were wrong: I lacked a meditation-word to act as a precise focus for my attention.

By focusing exclusively on the meditation-word, the mind became centered and never slipped back again. The way it had regressed before was an excellent lesson. I felt I'd rather die than let my mind suffer another decline. I couldn't stand to stay in the world bearing the mass of suffering that would come if it regressed again, because I had already been through it before – more than a year of the most acute suffering. There's no suffering that burns more than the suffering that comes when one's meditation deteriorates. If mine were to deteriorate again, it'd kill me; which was why I was really meticulous in keeping watch over my mind from then on. I wouldn't let the mind regress, and so it kept on progressing.

The first time I saw the wonder of the mind was when I began sitting in meditation all night – right from the very first night. I was investigating pain, and was it ever severe! At first, I hadn't planned on sitting until dawn. But the more I sat, the more the pain began to grow. No matter how I contemplated it, I didn't have any success at all. "Eh. What is this? Okay, if I'm going to die today, let me die." So I made a resolution in that moment: "From this moment on, I'll remain seated in this posture until dawn. If I survive, so be it. If not, so be it."

I probed right into the pain, forcing the mind into action. Wisdom had never been mobilized in that way, but when the mind was really cornered, at the end of its rope, wisdom stirred itself into action, keeping up with events from every angle until it was fully alert to the pain, fully alert to the body and fully alert to the affairs of the mind. Each was known as a separate reality. Pain, body and mind then split away from one another and disappeared completely, even though nothing like that had ever happened to me before. The body disappeared from my sense of awareness. The pain completely vanished. All that was left was an awareness that was simply aware. It wasn't the sort of outstanding awareness we might imagine it to be. It was just simple awareness, but very subtle, very refined and very amazing in that moment.

When I withdrew from that state, I renewed my investigation, but when I used the strategies I had used before, I didn't get the same results, because the old strategies were now memories from the past. I had to come up with new strategies to keep up with events of the present moment. The mind then settled down again. That night, it settled down three times, and then dawn arrived. Was I ever amazed at myself!

That morning when I got the chance, I went to tell Venerable Ajaan Mun. Normally, I'd be very intimidated by him, but that morning I wasn't intimidated at all. I wanted to tell him the truth, so that he could see the results of my steadfast determination. I spoke with audacity, even though I had never spoken that way with him before. I really told it to him straight – crash! bang! – and after he had listened, he said, "That's the way it's got to be!" That's just what he said! He really let me have it. He explained things to my complete satisfaction. As soon

as he praised me and spurred me on, I felt like the master's pet dog, all raring to bark and bite.

After one or two more days, I sat up in meditation all night again. After another two or three more days, I did it again, until my state of mind was thoroughly amazing. The fear of death disappears when the mind really knows. When you separate the physical elements to investigate the nature of life and death, the four elements of earth, water, wind and fire dissolve down into their original properties. Space returns to its original property as space. The mind that used to fear death becomes even more prominent. So what is it that dies? When the mind knows so prominently in this way, how can it die? The mind doesn't die. So what's it afraid of? We've been lied to. The defilements have lied to the living beings of the world, making them fear death, even though actually nothing dies.

When I'd investigate on one day, I'd get one approach; on another day, I'd get another approach, but they were all hard-hitting and amazing. The mind was more and more amazing and brave, to the point where I felt, "When the time comes to die, what sort of pain do they think they're going to bring out to fool me? Today's pain is complete in every way. Beyond this, there's simply death. I've seen all the aspects of pain; I've understood and dealt with them all. So when the time comes to die, what sort of pain can they possibly bring out to deceive me? There's no way pain can deceive me. As for death, nothing dies. So what is there to fear aside from the defilements that lie to us, making us fall for their deceitful tricks? From this point on, I'll never fall for their tricks again."

That's the way the mind is when it knows, and it knew clearly right from the very first night. As for the constant fluctuations of my mental state, since that first night it never regressed again. That first night it became clear: "This is how the mind that doesn't regress is supposed to be." It was as if the mind had been climbing up and falling down, climbing up and falling down, until finally it climbed up and grabbed hold tight, 100 per cent sure that it would never fall again. This was why I accelerated my efforts full speed.



During that rains retreat, I sat up all night in meditation nine or ten times, but never two nights in a row. Sometimes I'd skip two or three nights, sometimes six or seven. I got to the point where I was completely sure about pain – heavy or light, big or small. I understood how to deal with pain – how to sidestep it or how to cure it right in time – without being shaken by it. I wasn't even afraid of death, because I had investigated it with the most adroit strategies. Mindfulness and wisdom were completely up on death in every way.

Speaking of effort in the practice, my tenth rains retreat was when I made the greatest effort. In all my life, I have never made a more vigorous effort than I did during that rains retreat. The mind went all out, and so did the body. From that point on, I continued making progress until the mind became solid as a rock. In other words, I was so skilled in my samadhi that the mind was as unshakeable as a slab of rock. Soon, I became addicted to the total peace and calm of that samadhi state; so much so that my meditation practice remained stuck at that level of samadhi for five full years.

Once I was able to get past that samadhi, with the help of Venerable Ajaan Mun, I set out to investigate. When I began to investigate with wisdom, things went quickly and easily because my samadhi was fully developed. It was as if

all the materials for building a house were right at hand, but I hadn't yet put them together to build the house, and so they remained just useless pieces of wood. My meditation practice simply stalled at samadhi. Because I didn't combine samadhi with mindfulness and wisdom, it couldn't progress any further.

As soon as I investigated with wisdom, I began to know what was what. I was able to steadily cut off the defilements. I began to wake up: "All this time I've been lying in samadhi as if I were dead and it hasn't accomplished a thing!" So I stepped up my efforts at wisdom, making it work day and night without putting a brake on it at all.

I'm the sort of person who goes to extremes. Whatever tack I set out on, that's the only tack I take. When I began following the path of wisdom, I started criticizing samadhi as being like lying down dead. Actually, samadhi is a means for resting the mind. If you practice properly, that's the way it is. But instead, I criticized samadhi as being like lying down dead. "All these years, and it hasn't given rise to wisdom."

So, I accelerated my efforts at wisdom, beginning first with body contemplation. When I contemplated unattractiveness, it was remarkable how adroit and audacious the mind became. I could perceive right through whatever person I looked at. To tell you frankly how audacious my mind was (and here I have to ask the forgiveness of both the men and women involved if it's wrong to speak too frankly), it wouldn't have to be a question of old women, you know. If a gathering was full of young ladies, I could march right in without any sign of lust appearing at all. That's how daring the mind was because of its contemplation of unattractiveness.

Looking at a person, I saw just bones wrapped up in skin; nothing but flesh, all glaring and red. So where could I see any beauty? The power of the unattractiveness was really strong. No matter whose body I looked at, that's how I'd perceive it. So where would I find any beauty to make me feel desire? This was why I'd dare march right in... really beautiful young ladies, you know (I'll have to keep asking forgiveness until I've finished with this "forest mad-

ness"). When I felt daring like that, I could march right in with no trouble at all, because I was sure of my strength.

But this daring wasn't entirely correct, in the sense that the mind was rather intoxicated with its own power; which is why I criticized myself after the mind had passed that point. This daring was a kind of madness, but while I was following the path, it was the right course, because that was how I had to follow it through.

I contemplated unattractiveness until no physical desire appeared at all. It gradually faded away, all on its own, without giving any specific indication that it was gone. It didn't give me any assurance that lust or passion for the human body had disappeared at this or that point in time, so I had to deliberate again. I couldn't go along with lust simply fading away on its own. That is, my mind wouldn't accept it. If lust had been wiped out at any particular point, there should have been some sort of indication, so that I could know clearly that it was all gone for this or that reason, at this or that moment. It should have had its moment.

So the mind had to back up and discover new approaches to remedy the situation. If lust were really all gone, why hadn't there been a clear indication that it had been wiped out at this or that moment? As soon as I saw a person's body, I would perceive right through it. I saw nothing but flesh and bones in that body. I wouldn't see a beautiful woman or a beautiful person, because the power of my contemplation of unattractiveness was so strong that I'd perceive everyone as a pile of bones. What could possibly make the mind feel attraction or desire when it's in a state like that?

I now had to turn around and take a new approach. I brought attractiveness in to force out the unattractiveness. I covered the pile of bones with skin to make it beautiful. At first, I had to force the mind to do it. Otherwise, it immediately broke through to unattractiveness, because it was so adept in that way. I forced the mind to visualize the bones covered with skin so that they'd appear beautiful, and then had that beautiful body cling right to mine. That was how

I contemplated. I'd do walking meditation visualizing the beauty of that body clinging to mine, clinging right to mine as I walked back and forth. If there was any desire still left, it would have to show. If not, then let me know that it was gone.

I practiced this way for four full days without any physical attraction or desire appearing at all. Even though it was an extremely beautiful body, nothing appeared. The image kept trying to change into a pile of bones wrapped in skin, but I forced the mind to stay just at the skin level.

On the fourth night, tears began to flow. "I've had enough. I give in." In other words, the mind wasn't feeling any pleasure. It said that it had had enough, so I tested it again: "Enough of what? If you admit that there's no more desire, then let me know. I won't accept your giving in like this. To give in like this is just a ruse. I won't go along with it."

I continued contemplating every facet to find which one would make the mind feel desire and to see at which moment the desire would arise, so that I could then take whatever might appear and focus on it as an object to be contemplated and uprooted. The night got later and later, and I kept on focusing in – but I wasn't focused on contemplating unattractiveness at that point. I was contemplating nothing but attractiveness for those entire four days, because I was determined to find an approach to test the truth of the situation.

At about 10 p.m. on the night of the fourth day, there was a flickering, as if the mind was going to feel lust for that beautiful body that had been constantly clinging to me during that period. It was a peculiar sort of flickering. Mindfulness was alert to it, because mindfulness was there all the time. As soon as the flickering appeared, I kept encouraging it. "See that flickering? We've caught the criminal who has been in hiding. See? So how can it be gone? If it's gone, why does it have to behave like this?" I focused in on it. That flickering was a condition of the mind that appeared only slightly, with no effect on the body at all. It was inside the mind. When I encouraged it, it flickered again, which proved that lust wasn't all gone.

So now that it wasn't all gone, what was I supposed to do?

I now had to alternate my tactics again. Since this was a path I had never taken before, something I had never known before, it was very difficult to proceed. As soon as I focused on unattractiveness, attractiveness would vanish in the flash of an eye. It would vanish extremely fast because I was already adept at unattractiveness. As soon as I focused on unattractiveness, the body would turn immediately into a pile of bones, so I would have to focus on attractiveness to make it beautiful again. I kept changing back and forth between the two this way. This took a long time because it was a path I had never trod. I didn't understand, so I had to try out different methods until I had enough confidence to settle on one path or another.

I finally came to the truth when I sat visualizing an image of unattractiveness right in front of me. The mind focused on unattractiveness standing still right there. I wouldn't let it move or change in any way. I made it stay right there like that. If it was an image of bones wrapped in skin or a pile of bones with the skin removed, I made it stay right there in front of me. The mind stared right at it, with mindfulness focused, waiting to learn the truth from that image of unattractiveness, to see what it would do, to see how this pile of unattractiveness would move or change.

Because of my mental adeptness, the image stayed just as I wanted it to. If I didn't want the mind to destroy the image, it wouldn't destroy it. If I had focused on destroying it, it would have been demolished in an instant because of the speed of wisdom. But I didn't let the mind destroy it. I had it stay right there in front of me in order to find the truth that would give me certainty.

As I kept focusing in, the image of unattractiveness standing there before me was gradually sucked into the mind, absorbed into the mind, until I finally realized that unattractiveness was a matter of the mind itself. The state of mind that had fixed on the idea of unattractiveness sucked it in – which meant that attractiveness and unattractiveness were simply a matter of the mind deceiving itself.



The mind then let go in a flash. It let go of external unattractiveness. It understood clearly now because it had made the break. "This is how it's supposed to be. It's been merely a matter of the mind painting pictures to deceive itself, and getting excited over its shadows. Those external images aren't passion, aversion and delusion. The mind is what has passion, aversion and delusion." As soon as the mind knew this clearly, it extricated itself from external affairs and moved inward. As soon as the mind focused outward, it knew that this outflow was the inner affairs of the mind displaying themselves. So now the image of unattractiveness appeared exclusively within the mind.

I then focused my investigation within the mind. But now it wasn't a matter of worldly passion. It was something very different. The affairs of worldly passion were all gone. The mind understood clearly and had passed its verdict. It had understood. What remained was the image appearing within the mind. It was known clearly that this internal image came from the mind. When it disappeared, it disappeared there and didn't go anywhere else. The instant after I focused on making an image appear, it vanished. Before I had focused on it for long, it would vanish.

After that, it was just like a lightning flash: As soon as I focused on making an image, it would vanish immediately. Because of the speed of the arising and disappearing, there was no time to elaborate on its being attractive or anything else. The instant it appeared – blip! – it vanished.

From that point on, there were no more images in the mind. The mind became completely empty. As for external unattractiveness, that problem had already been taken care of. I had understood it from the moment it was sucked into the mind, and the mind had immediately let go of external unattractiveness. It let go of sights, sounds, smells, tastes and everything external – because the mind was what had been the deceiver. Once I understood that point clearly, those other things were no longer a problem. The mind understood immediately and let go of external things once and for all.

After the internal images had all disappeared, the mind was empty. Completely empty. Whatever I focused on was completely empty. I looked at trees, mountains and buildings and saw them merely as shadows. The major part – the mind – was totally empty. Even when I looked at my own body, I saw it simply as a shadow. As for the mind itself, it was empty clear through – to the point where I exclaimed to myself, "Is the mind really this empty?" It was empty at all times. Nothing passed into it.

Even though it was that empty, I formed mental pictures as a way of exercising it. The images I formed were a means of exercising the mind to make it even more adept at emptiness, to the point where after a single blip it would be empty – a single blip and it'd be empty. The moment anything was formed – blip! – the mind would be empty right then.

At that point – the point where the mind was empty in full measure – the mind's awareness was also prominent in full measure. It fully comprehended body, feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. It fully let go of them on its own, with nothing remaining. Only awareness was left. There was a feeling of relatedness and intimacy, a very subtle sensitivity for that awareness that's hard to describe in line with its reality. There was a feeling of absorption exclusively

for this awareness. Any other condition that arose would vanish in the same instant.

I kept watch over it. If this were the time of the Buddha, we would call this level of mindfulness and wisdom supreme-mindfulness and supreme-wisdom; but in our day and age we shouldn't reach for those labels. It's enough for our purposes to call them automatic mindfulness and wisdom. That's appropriate enough. There's no need to call them anything more exalted than that, for this doesn't deviate at all from the truth as it exists. Automatic mindfulness and wisdom were the reason why the mind was prominent, and this prominence made it bright all the way through.

One day, I was doing walking meditation on the western side of Wat Doi Dhammachedi. I had gone without food for three or four days, and that day was the lunar observance day, so people were coming to the monastery to give alms. At daybreak I began doing walking meditation. While I was standing in contemplation on the meditation path that morning, an uncanny feeling of wonder arose, to the point where I exclaimed, "Why is it that my mind is so amazing? Whatever I look at – even the earth on which I tread and see clearly with my eyes – why is it that the mind, which is the major part, is completely empty? There are no trees or mountains in the mind. It's completely empty, with nothing left. Nothing but emptiness fills the heart."

I stood there contemplating for a moment, when suddenly a realization arose: "If there is a point or a center of the knower anywhere, that point is the nucleus of existence." That's what it said, and I was bewildered.

Actually, the word "point" referred to that point of the knower. If I had understood this problem in terms of the truth that appeared to warn me, things would have been able to disband right then and there. But instead of understanding, I was bewildered – because it was something I had never before known or seen. If there was a point, it would be the point of the knower. If there was a center, it would mean the center of the knower. But where was it? There in that knowing mind. That was the essence of existence. The statement that appeared

in my mind already said so clearly. There was nothing at all wrong about it, but I was simply bewildered. "What is this?" So, for the time being, I didn't get any benefit from it at all. I let more than three months pass by in vain, even though the problem was still weighing on my mind. I couldn't put it down.

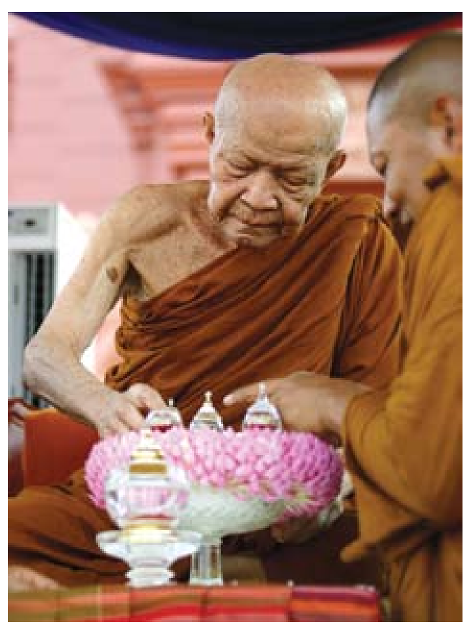
When the time came for me to know, I was contemplating just the mind – nothing wide-ranging – because the mind already knew everything on the external level. Whatever sights, sounds, smells, tastes or tactile sensations there might be throughout the universe, the mind had already known and relinquished them. It was no longer interested in investigating them. It wasn't even willing to investigate body, feeling, memory, thought or consciousness. Its only interest lay in that conspicuous awareness, together with the subtle feelings that pervaded the mind.

Mindfulness and wisdom continued making contact with that awareness, examining it back and forth. But you should know that the "point" I refer to was a conventional reality. No matter how magnificent it might appear, it was still magnificence in the realm of convention. No matter how radiant or splendid it might be, it was still radiance and splendour in the realm of convention, because it was still permeated with delusion.

Delusion forms the essence of conventional reality. The focal point of that prominence eventually began to show its ups and downs – in keeping with the very refined level of the mind – so that I was able to catch sight of them. Sometimes it was a little tarnished, some-







times radiant. Sometimes there was a slight dissatisfaction, sometimes complete contentment. The changes were very slight, in line with the refinement of the mind at that level, but they were enough for me to detect its irregularities.

Greed, for example, is something blatant, easy to understand and plainly harmful, and yet the world is still content to feel greed. Think about it! Anger is also blatant, and yet the world is still content to feel anger. Infatuation, love, hate: All these things are blatant, easy to understand and plainly harmful, and yet the world is still content to feel them.

But this was not the same sort of thing at all. The mind had gone way beyond external objects. It had let go of all those other things, but why was it still attached to this amazing radiance? Using mindfulness and wisdom that were continually focused inside at all times, I noticed that it occasionally became slightly tarnished. Or it displayed a slight dissatisfaction – which was a form of change and so nothing constant or trustworthy.

Ultimately, there was no escaping it: I had to see that this state of mind was not to be trusted, so I came to reflect, "Why is it that this state of mind can be so changeable? Now it's defiled, now it's radiant, now there's satisfaction, now there's dissatisfaction. It's not always constant and true. How can a mind as refined as this still show such a variety of conditions?

As soon as mindfulness and wisdom turned to take an interest in investigating this state of mind, a totally unexpected realization sprang up within the mind: "Defilement, radiance, satisfaction and dissatisfaction: These are all conventional realities. They are all not-self."

That was enough. Mindfulness and wisdom realized that a state of mind immersed in delusion was a conventional reality that should simply be let go. It shouldn't be held to. A moment after this realization arose to warn mindfulness and wisdom, which were acting as the sentinels at that moment, both mindfulness and wisdom appeared to become impartial and impassive, not stirring themselves to perform any duty at all. At that moment, the mind was neutral,

not focused on anything. Wisdom didn't do any work. Mindfulness was alert in its normal way, without being focused on anything.

That moment – when the mind, mindfulness and wisdom were each impassive and impartial – was the moment when the mental universe over which delusion held sway trembled and quaked. Delusion was thrown down from its throne on the heart. In its place, the pure mind appeared at the same moment that delusion was toppled and eradicated through the power of triumphant mindfulness and wisdom – the moment when the sky came crashing down and the universe within trembled and quaked, showing its final marvel on the border between convention and release. Judgement was passed in the court of justice, with knowledge and vision of release acting as judge. The Middle Way, the truth of the path, was declared absolute winner, while the truth of the origin of suffering was knocked out and carried off on a stretcher, with no way of reviving ever again.

I was utterly astounded and exclaimed, "Isn't it amazing? Isn't it amazing? Where has this Dhamma been hiding? How is it that the genuine Dhamma, this amazing Dhamma, exceeding all expectations – exceeding all the world – has now appeared in the mind and is one with the mind? And where were the Buddha and Noble Sangha before this? How is it that these tremendously amazing refuges have now become one with the heart? Is this what the true Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are like?" They didn't fit in with our speculations at all, but were simply a pure truth dwelling with a pure truth.

Then I reflected with dismay on the plight of my fellow living beings: "Since this is what the genuine Dhamma is like, how could it be brought out and taught so that others would know and understand? Wouldn't it be more appropriate to live alone until the day the body breaks apart, rather than try to teach anyone?"

As soon as I considered this, a kind of realization suddenly appeared to me: "The Lord Buddha knew this amazing Dhamma all by himself but was able to become the Teacher of all living beings throughout the three levels of



existence. How is it that I have been able to teach myself and yet I get discouraged at the thought of being able to teach others? The teaching methods are not hidden or mysterious, nor is the knowledge that comes from them." When I realized this, my discouragement at the thought of teaching my fellow monks gradually faded away.

This event made me think of the first moments after the Buddha's Enlightenment, when he wearied at the thought of taking the excellent Dhamma in his heart and teaching it to the world because he felt that it lay beyond the capability of other people to understand. Even though he aspired to be a Teacher to the world, he felt that the Dhamma he had realized was a Dhamma beyond reach, so that it would be hopeless to encourage the world to accept it and practice for its realization. But, when he reflected on the path he had followed to Enlight-

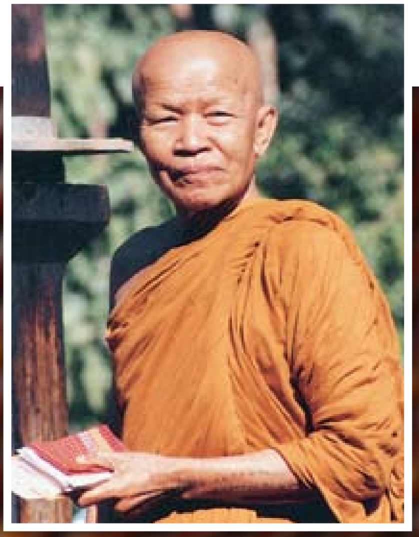
enment, he realized that the Dhamma wasn't beyond reach or beyond hope, that there would be infinite benefits for the world if he were to teach the way of the Dhamma whose results he had come to see beyond a doubt. This was why he made up his mind to teach the world from that point on.

I felt the same way because it was an utterly amazing Dhamma that I had never before experienced. When I looked solely at the results in the present, without reflecting back on the causes – the path I followed – I felt disheartened and abandoned the idea of telling others about this Dhamma. But after reflecting back on the path I followed, I felt more like speaking about the various facets of the Dhamma to the people who have studied and trained with me ever since.

This Dhamma is a fixed truth. Those who know this principle of truth all trust it in the same way, because the true Buddha, the true Dhamma and the true Sangha exist in the heart. The heart that is truly pure is the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha in full measure. I ask that you take this teaching and earnestly put it into practice. Gain release so as to see it clearly in your heart. The heart that is currently oppressed by defilement and the heart when it has attained release from that oppression: How do they differ in value? Come to see this clearly in your own heart! You won't see it anywhere else! It will become immediately apparent within the meditator who practices correctly.





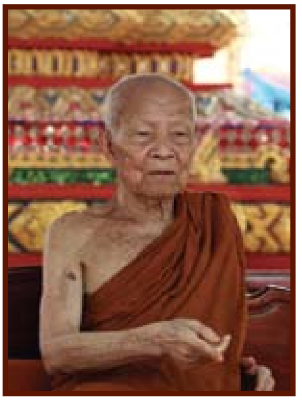






The Work *of a* Contemplative





Here at Baan Taad Forest Monastery, we don't practice in line with people's wishes and opinions, but rather in line with the principles of Dhamma and Vinaya, the principles of Buddhism. We do this for the sake of the public at large who rely on the religion as a guiding principle in what is good and right, and who rely on the good and right behavior of monks and novices, the religious leaders for Buddhists at large. For this reason, I'm not interested in favoring anyone's opinions over and above the principles of Dhamma and Vinaya that are the basis of Buddhist practice. If our minds start to bend under the influence of the views and opinions of any one person – or even of the worldly majority who have no limits or standards – then monasteries and the religion will come to have no limits or standards either. Monasteries that bend under the influence of the world, without any reasonable underlying support, will lack order and discipline. They will become monasteries that have no religious substance remaining in them at all. Those who seek things of real value to revere and respect – in other words, intelligent people – will be unable to find any substantial goodness that will have a hold on their hearts, because there will be nothing but worthless, counterfeit things filling the monasteries, filling the monks, the novices and the nuns, filling everything everywhere. In homes as well as in monasteries, in the area of the world as well as the Dhamma, everything will get mixed into being one with what is counterfeit and lacking in any true value.

For this reason, we must keep things in their separate places. The religion and the world, even though they may exist side by side, are not the same thing. A monastery – whether it's located in a town, outside of a town or in a forest – is not the same as a town. The people who come to stay there are not the same as ordinary people. The monastery has to be a monastic community. The monks have to be monastics with their own independent Dhamma and Vinaya that don't rely on any particular individual. This is an important principle that can impress the hearts of intelligent people who are searching for inspiring

principles of truth to revere and respect. I view things from this angle more than any other. Even the Buddha, our Teacher, viewed things from this angle, as we can see from the time he addressed Venerable Nagita.

When a crowd of people came to see the Buddha, shouting and making a big racket, he said, "Nagita, who is that coming our way, making a commotion like fishmongers squabbling over fish? We don't aspire to this sort of behavior, which brings destruction to the religion. The religion is something to guard and preserve so that the world will find peace and calm – like clear, clean water well-guarded and preserved so that people in general can drink and bathe at their convenience. The religion is like clear, clean water, which is why we don't want anyone to disturb it, to make it muddy and turbid."

This is what the Buddha said to Venerable Nagita. He then told Venerable Nagita to send the crowd away, telling them that their manner and the time of day – it was night – were not appropriate for visiting the monks who live in quiet solitude. Polite manners are things that intelligent people choose, and there are plenty of other times to come. This is a time when the monks want quietude, so they shouldn't be disturbed in a way that wastes their time and causes them difficulties without serving any purpose at all.

This is an example set by our Teacher. He wasn't the sort of person to mingle and associate with lay people at all hours without any reasonable limits or rules – as though the religion was a distillery, and the monks and novices were distributing liquor so that the public could be drunk without ever sobering up for a day. Actually, the religion is medicine for curing drunkenness. Monks and novices are supposed to be doctors for curing their own drunkenness and that of the world. They're not supposed to sell liquor and intoxicants to the point where they have no sense of shame.

Whenever people set foot in the monastery, we assume that they come in good faith – and so we compromise and end up making allowances until we forget ourselves and forget the Dhamma and Vinaya, neglecting proper monastic standards to the point where we destroy ourselves, the monastery and the

religion bit by bit, day by day, until the whole lot turns to mud. Neither home dwellers nor monastery dwellers can find any principles to hold to. In the end, a lot of worthless stuff is accumulated in the monasteries because the minds of the monks and novices are overcome by defilements.

Because of that, each of us monks should reflect a great deal on these matters. Don't see anything as having greater value than Dhamma and Vinaya, which are the major principles for uniting the hearts of Buddhist practitioners in confidence, conviction and peace. If the principles of Dhamma and Vinaya are lacking or deficient, the benefits received by Buddhists will have to be deficient in turn, until nothing remains to sustain their hearts. Even though the Buddha's teachings fill the texts and copies of the Canon fill every monastery, the important essence that can inspire people to put their hearts into the practice for the sake of what is beneficial and auspicious doesn't exist. This is something we can clearly see in the present age.

Monks and novices are important examples that can help the religion prosper and serve as a model to the people who become involved with it for the sake of all things meritorious and auspicious. If monks and novices are intent on behaving in line with the principles of Dhamma and Vinaya as taught by the Buddha, they are undoubtedly the ones who will preserve the good pattern of the religion and of the paths, the fruitions and Nibbana. People will take them as their standard – because there are still plenty of intelligent people left in the world. As for stupid people, even though they may overflow the planet, they have no fixed standards. When they feel pleased, they praise you. But, that praise merely comes from their stupidity and serves no purpose. When they feel displeased, they criticize you. That criticism serves no purpose, either for them or for you. If intelligent people praise you though, that can be taken to heart and benefits both parties. If they praise the Sangha, they praise it intelligently in line with the principles of truth. At the same time, those members of the Sangha who hold to reason can make themselves a field of merit for others, so that others too can benefit. When intelligent people criticize the Sangha, they have

sound reasons which should be considered carefully. We who practice should make ourselves well aware of this point.

Wherever you go, don't forget that you are a practitioner of the religion, a representative of our Teacher. You're following the religion and proclaiming it through your practice. This doesn't mean that you have to teach the public to understand the Dhamma. Just by practicing rightly, you become a visible example that can make them feel conviction in the religion from what they see. Even more so when you can explain the Dhamma correctly according to the principles of practice taught by the Buddha. This is all the more the right and proper proclamation of the religion that good people can trust in their hearts. In this way, the religion will flourish more and more in the hearts of Buddhists.

Wherever you go, wherever you stay, don't forget these basic principles – moral virtue, samadhi and wisdom – which are the basis of our work as contemplatives. These are the essential principles of each monk's work. This is when we become "Sons of the Sakyan, of the victorious Buddha." This is how we become disciples of the Tathagata; not by merely shaving our heads and donning the yellow robe. That's something of little significance that anyone can do. What's important is behaving in line with our duties.

Moral virtue: We should be careful to maintain our precepts so that they are never broken or stained. We should be careful, using mindfulness and wisdom in every activity. Whatever else may get broken, don't let your precepts get broken, for they are the invaluable treasure of your status as a monk, something on which you can truly stake your life.

Samadhi: If calm and concentration have yet to arise, you should strive to train the heart and bring it under control, coming down hard on the unruliness caused by the power of the defilements, so that you can rein it in with the practice. Use mindfulness and wisdom to block the mind's recklessness so that it settles down in peace and tranquility. This is our samadhi treasure as monks.

Wisdom is intelligence and ingenuity. Wisdom is useful in all places at all times. Always make use of wisdom, both in your internal and external activities.

Wisdom becomes especially important in your internal activities, when you're investigating the various kinds of mental defilements. Wisdom and mindfulness should not be separated. They have to perform their duties together. Mindfulness keeps watch over the work that wisdom is performing. When mindfulness lapses, their work won't accomplish its full aims. For this reason, mindfulness is a necessary quality that must always be kept fastened to your work.



These three duties constitute our work as contemplatives. Remember them and always take them to heart. Don't be apathetic, or you'll become a shameless monk who is callous to the fact that the world is always bowing down to you.



The word "wisdom" means our ability to investigate and unravel the various factors that become involved with us, both within and without. (And here, I have to ask forgiveness of the men and women interested in the Dhamma who fall under the condition I'm about to discuss. Please reflect on my words in all fairness.) The physical body: Usually it's the body of the opposite sex that causes meditators the most problems. As the Dhamma says, there is no sight that's a greater enemy to the mental state of a contemplative than the sight of the opposite sex. The same holds true for the voice, the smell, the taste and the touch of the opposite sex. These are the foremost dangers that contemplatives face, so we have to show greater care and restraint toward these sense objects than toward any others. Mindfulness and wisdom must come to terms with these important factors because they can cause more problems than any other aspect of practice.



Therefore, we should analyze the physical body with our wisdom so as to see it clearly. The words "the body of a woman" or "the body of a man" are merely names given in line with convention. Actually, the physical body is not a woman or a man. It's simply an ordinary body just like ours, covered entirely with skin. If we look inside, there's flesh, tendons and bones. That body, like ours, is full of filthy and repulsive things. No part of it is basically different from our own body. There is merely recognition in our mind that identifies "woman" or "man". The words woman and man are deeply engraved within the heart, even though they merely represent suppositions that have no basis in truth.

The same is true with the voice: It's just an ordinary sound, yet we recognize it as the voice of the opposite sex and so it stabs deep into the heart – especially for those of us who are ordained – and goes clear through, to the point where we forget ourselves. The heart gets cut at the stem, even though we continue to live. The stem of the heart is torn, rotten and putrid, and yet we don't die. Instead, we listen with pleasure to the song of our heart as it is being cut at the stem, without ever growing tired of it.

The smell: It's an ordinary smell, just like ours, because it's the smell of a person. Even if we bring perfumes and scents from the realms of the devas and Brahmas to rub down that body, the smell is the smell of those things, not the smell of a woman or man. So analyze this and make careful distinctions.

The touch of another body is no different from one part of our own body touching another part. Each of the parts is just earth, water, wind and fire, just like ours. We can't perceive any difference. So we have to investigate clearly and make comparisons, comparing the sight, sound, smell, taste and touch of the woman or man with our own sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. There's no difference in terms of the true principles of nature, aside from the mind making assumptions in line with its thoughts.

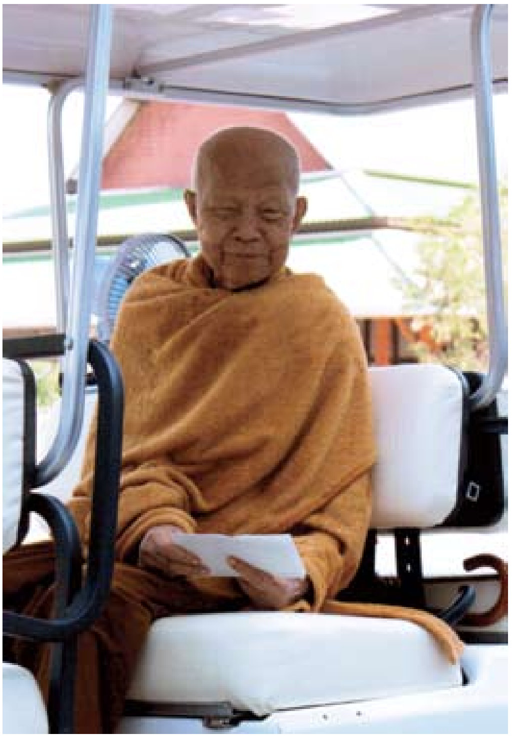
For this reason, we must use wisdom to unravel these phenomena. Don't let suppositions of any kind be enemies that infiltrate and destroy your heart. Shake them off using wisdom, reducing them to the truth that these things are

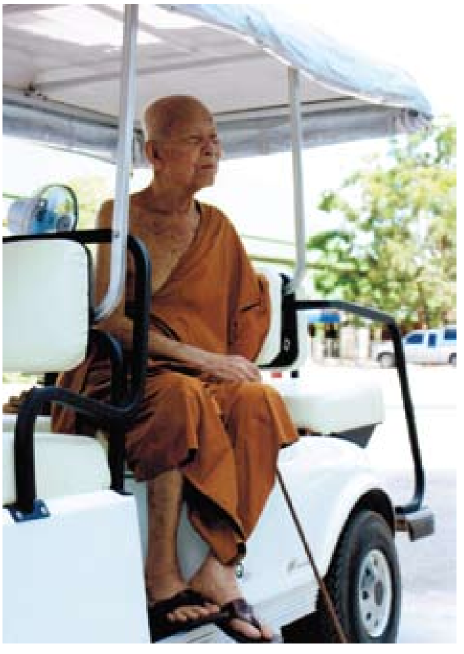
just sights, just sounds, just smells, just tastes and just tactile sensations, all of which pass by and disappear like other phenomena. This is without a doubt the right way to contemplate that gradually uproots our attachments and misconceptions concerning these matters.

All the objects that you investigate in the world are changing, unsatisfactory and not-self. There's nothing lasting to be found. All things arise dependent on other factors and then fall apart. Whatever the object: If it exists in the world, it has to fall apart. If it doesn't fall apart, we will. If it doesn't break up, we'll break up. If it doesn't leave, we'll leave – because this world is full of leaving and separation through the principles of nature. So, investigate with wisdom in this way to understand them clearly before they leave us or we leave them, and then let them go in line with the truth. When we can do this, the mind will be at ease.

Samadhi refers to the stability and solidity of the heart, beginning with its small moments of stillness and peace, and progressing to the refined and stable levels of complete tranquility. If the mind isn't trained, isn't improved, isn't forced with various tactics backed up by mindfulness, wisdom, conviction and persistence, it won't be able to attain peace till its dying day. It will die in vain. It will die restless and confused, straying off into 108 different preoccupations. It won't have any mindfulness or self-awareness. It will die without any principles or standards to hold to. It will die just as a kite whose string is cut floats wherever the wind blows. Even while still alive, the mind lives without any principles or standards, because of its absent-mindedness and heedless attitude and because it lacks any sense of reasonable purpose. It simply drifts. If we live simply drifting along without any good principles to ground us, then when we go, we'll have to go simply drifting.

What purpose does drifting serve? What certainty can we have for our destination? So as long as we're alive and aware, we should build certainty in our hearts by being strong and unflinching in matters of solid worth. Then we can be certain of ourselves both while we live and when we die. We won't be upset or affected by life or death, by being separated from other people or





our own bodies – something we all must meet with, because these things exist within us all.

It's not the case that wisdom arises automatically on the heels of samadhi when the mind has been centered. Wisdom has to be exercised and trained to think, explore and investigate. Only then will it arise, with samadhi as its support. Samadhi on its own cannot turn into wisdom. It remains as samadhi. Samadhi merely refreshes and calms the mind. When the mind is content in tranquility, it doesn't want to chase after distracting and confusing thoughts. We then take the tranquil mind and use it with wisdom to investigate and unravel various things, all of which are impermanent, unsatisfactory and without self-identity. All phenomena are filled with these same conditions, so use wisdom to contemplate – from whatever angle most suits your temperament – by investigating these things with interest and with the desire to really know and

see them as they truly are. Don't simply investigate without any intention or mindfulness in control.

In particular, the meditation theme of unattractiveness is a good cure – a very good cure – for the mind obsessed with lust and passion. However strong the lust, that's how strongly you should investigate unattractiveness until you can see the world with your own body and those of others as a cemetery of fresh corpses. Lust won't have a chance to flare up when wisdom has penetrated to the knowledge that the body is filled with repulsiveness. Who would feel lust for repulsiveness? Who would feel lust for things with no beauty? For things that are disgusting? This is one form of the medicine of unattractiveness, one of the prime medicines for curing the diseases of lust and craving. Once the mind has continually investigated unattractiveness to the point where it becomes so adept at contemplating the human body that it is able to visualize the body in whatever way it chooses, then the mind will converge to the level of unattractiveness within itself. Seeing the pictures of unattractiveness it paints as being illusions, the mind will then let go of both sides: the side of unattractiveness as well as the side of attractiveness.

Both attractiveness and unattractiveness are memory associations coupled with the affairs of lust. Once we have investigated and fully understood both sides, the word "attractive" will dissolve and no longer have meaning. The word "unattractive" will dissolve and no longer have meaning. That which gives the meanings of attractive and unattractive is the mind or, in other words, memory. We are now wise to memory as being what recognizes things. Because we see the harm of these associations, memory will no longer be able to interpret in such a way as to make the mind grasp and be attached again. When this is the case, the mind lets go of both attractiveness and unattractiveness – or of beauty and ugliness. Until that happens, these perceptions are merely tools for training the mind with wisdom, because the wisdom needed to uproot them is not yet proficient enough to let go.

When wisdom is proficient enough to realize the causes and effects of both sides – both of attractiveness and unattractiveness – it can then turn around to

know the function of memory that recognizes things as being attractive or unattractive. When wisdom clearly understands how memory functions and sees its harm, memory loses its power. The mind can see that memory is the real culprit. Attractive and unattractive objects are not to blame. The blame lies with memory's interpretation of objects as being attractive and unattractive, which deceives us into becoming attached. This is where the mind's focus starts moving inward. As our investigation is drawn inward, the mind steadily lets go of attachments.

When the mind has reached this stage, then attractive and unattractive images will appear in the mind without our having to focus on an external image. Images just appear in the mind. Even though the image appears in mind, we know clearly that the attractive or unattractive aspects of the phenomena that appear there come from memory. We know the image that appears in the mind, as well as the memory that recognizes it. Finally, the images in the mind vanish and memory – the interpretations – disbands. When the function of memory which used to fool us into seeing things as attractive and unattractive has disbanded, nothing remains to deceive the heart. This is how unattractiveness is investigated in line with the principles of the practice. But, you won't find this explanation anywhere in the texts. You'll find the truth only if you search for it in the principles of nature that exist within the body and the mind – where the Four Noble Truths and the Four Foundations of Mindfulness are located. You will find the things I've explained here only in the texts of your own heart.

Such is the nature of the body. We know clearly that every part of the body is simply a physical phenomenon. And what is there in these physical phenomena? All the parts – hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, marrow, spleen, heart, liver, membranes, kidneys, lungs, intestines, stomach, gorge, feces – are just physical phenomena, things separate from the mind. If we consider them as unattractive, who is it that gives them meaning, saying that this is attractive or that is unattractive? When did these things ever give themselves meanings? When did they ever say they were attractive or unattractive? They don't speak for themselves at all. Whatever

their truth is, that's how it's always been in line with their nature from the very beginning – but they are unaware of their own meaning. What interprets their meaning is memory. The one that falls for their meaning is also memory, which originates from our deluded mind. Once we are wise to the tricks of memory, all these meanings disappear. Each phenomenon has its separate reality. This is what it means to be wise to mental phenomena.

Feelings refer to the sensations of pleasure, pain and indifference that arise from the body. The body is a phenomenon that has existed since before feelings arose. Pains arise, remain and then vanish. The body is the body. The pain is a pain. Each is a separate reality. Investigate and analyze them so as to see them for what they are – just a feeling, just a body – without regarding them as a being, a person, us or anyone else, ours or anyone else's. The feeling isn't us, ours or anyone else's. It's simply something that appears for a moment and disappears, in line with its nature. That's the truth of it.

Memory means recognition and interpretation. Whatever it remembers – things near, far, past, present or future – vanishes immediately. It keeps vanishing – arising and vanishing, arising and vanishing – so how can we regard it as a self, a being, a person? Here we're referring to using wisdom on the refined level, which penetrates inward according to the truth that is clear to the heart without our having to ask anyone else.

Thought-formation refers to thought and imagination: Forming good thoughts, bad thoughts and neutral thoughts. These formations constantly arise and vanish, arise and vanish. The mind cannot make any sense out of these thought-formations unless memory takes up where they leave off and turns them into issues. As for memory, we already know it clearly, so what essence can there be in thought-formations that are picked up and turned into long issues? They are only mental phenomena arising and vanishing in the mind. This is thought-formation.

Consciousness refers to the field of cognizance, that which takes note the moment external phenomena make contact, as when visual objects make con-

tact with the eye and cognizance occurs. As soon as the object passes, this cognizance vanishes. No matter what phenomenon it takes note of, it's always ready to vanish with that thing. What sense or substance can we get out of something so fleeting? How can we assume it to be us or ours?

The five components of personal identity have arisen and passed away continuously, moment after moment, from the day of our birth to the present. On their own, they have no real substance and it is impossible to find any. The mind's interpretation of these phenomena is what lends them a semblance of personal reality. The mind clings to them as the essence of oneself, or as one's own personal property. This misconception creates a self-identity that becomes a burden heavier than an entire mountain, a burden that the mind carries within itself without gaining any benefit. Pain and suffering are its only reward for a misconceived attachment fostered by self-delusion.

When the mind has investigated these things and seen them clearly with sharp, incisive wisdom, the body is known to be a natural phenomenon that is real in accordance with its own inherent physical qualities. It is not intrinsic to oneself and so it is no longer an object of attachment. Bodily feelings – pleasant, painful and neutral feelings that occur within the body – are clearly known to be real, but only within their specific domain. They too are relinquished. But wisdom is as yet incapable of seeing through the subtle feelings that arise exclusively within the mind. So pleasant, painful and neutral feelings that occur only within the mind are conditions that the mind continues to be interested in investigating. Although at this stage we are unable to understand the truth about them, these subtle feelings will be constant reminders always prompting the mind to examine them.

Put simply, as soon as wisdom sees through the mental components of personality, the mind lets go. If wisdom has yet to see through them, it holds on. Once wisdom has seen through them completely, the mind relinquishes them all because it sees that they are merely ripplings inside the mind that have no real substance. A good thought arises and ceases; a bad thought arises and ceases – it is all the same. Whatever kind of thought appears in the mind, it is



just a configuration created by memory and thought that simply vanishes. There are no exceptions. No thought lasts more than an instant. Thoughts cannot be trusted because they do not last long enough to have any substantial meaning.

Having relinquished all attachment to personal identity, the mind at this level is exceedingly refined. But, although it has let go of everything else, it has yet to let go of itself. It remains permeated by a fundamental ignorance – ignorance about its own true nature. This basic delusion converges into a single point of focus. All of its external outlets having been cut off, it converges into the mind where it has no way to flow out. Delusion's outlets are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body, leading to sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations. Once mindfulness and wisdom are skilled enough to cut off these outflows for good, it's left with no way out. Its external agents have been neutralized; all that remains is a subtle incessant vibration resonating within the mind. Being deprived of an outlet for its activities, delusion depends solely on the mind as its base. As long as wisdom is unable to thoroughly transcend it, delusion will appear as subtle feelings of satisfaction, subtle feelings of dissat-

isfaction and a radiance that is truly awesome and amazing. So the mind keeps focusing the investigation on those factors.

Every conventional reality – regardless of how refined it may be or how bright and majestic it may appear – invariably manifests some irregular symptoms. These are sufficient to catch the mind's attention and make it search for a solution. Both the very refined satisfaction and dissatisfaction that arise exclusively within the mind, and the truly amazing radiance that emanates from it, have their origin in delusion. But since we have never before encountered them, we are deluded into grasping at them when we first investigate this point. We are lulled sound asleep by delusion, which causes us to believe that the subtle feelings of satisfaction and the amazing bright radiance are our true essence beyond name and form. Oblivious to our mistake, we take this majestic mind complete with delusion to be our one true self.

But not for long. At this level, the powerful faculties of supreme-mindfulness and supreme-wisdom are never complacent. They habitually keep scrutinizing, investigating and analyzing back and forth all the time. Eventually they must realize the truth. They will notice the subtle feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction displaying very slight variations that seem out of keeping with that majestic radiance. Even though the dissatisfaction that manifests is ever so slight, it is enough to make us suspicious. Why does the mind have these varying conditions? It's never constant. The very slight irregularities observed in the amazingly bright radiance at the center of the mind show just enough fluctuation to allow mindfulness and wisdom to catch sight of them.

Once they are detected, mistrust arises, alerting wisdom that they should be investigated. So the quality of the mind's awareness then becomes the focus of the investigation. Mindfulness and wisdom concentrate on this knowing point, trying to discover what it really is. They have already investigated everything of every sort to the extent that all other factors have been successfully eliminated. But this awareness which is so bright and so amazing: what exactly is it? As mindfulness and wisdom continue focusing in, the mind becomes the focal point of a full-scale investigation. It is turned into a battlefield

for supreme-mindfulness and supreme-wisdom. Before long, they are able to destroy the fundamental delusion that appears so magnificently amazing and majestic, totally obliterating it so that not even the smallest trace of it remains within the mind.

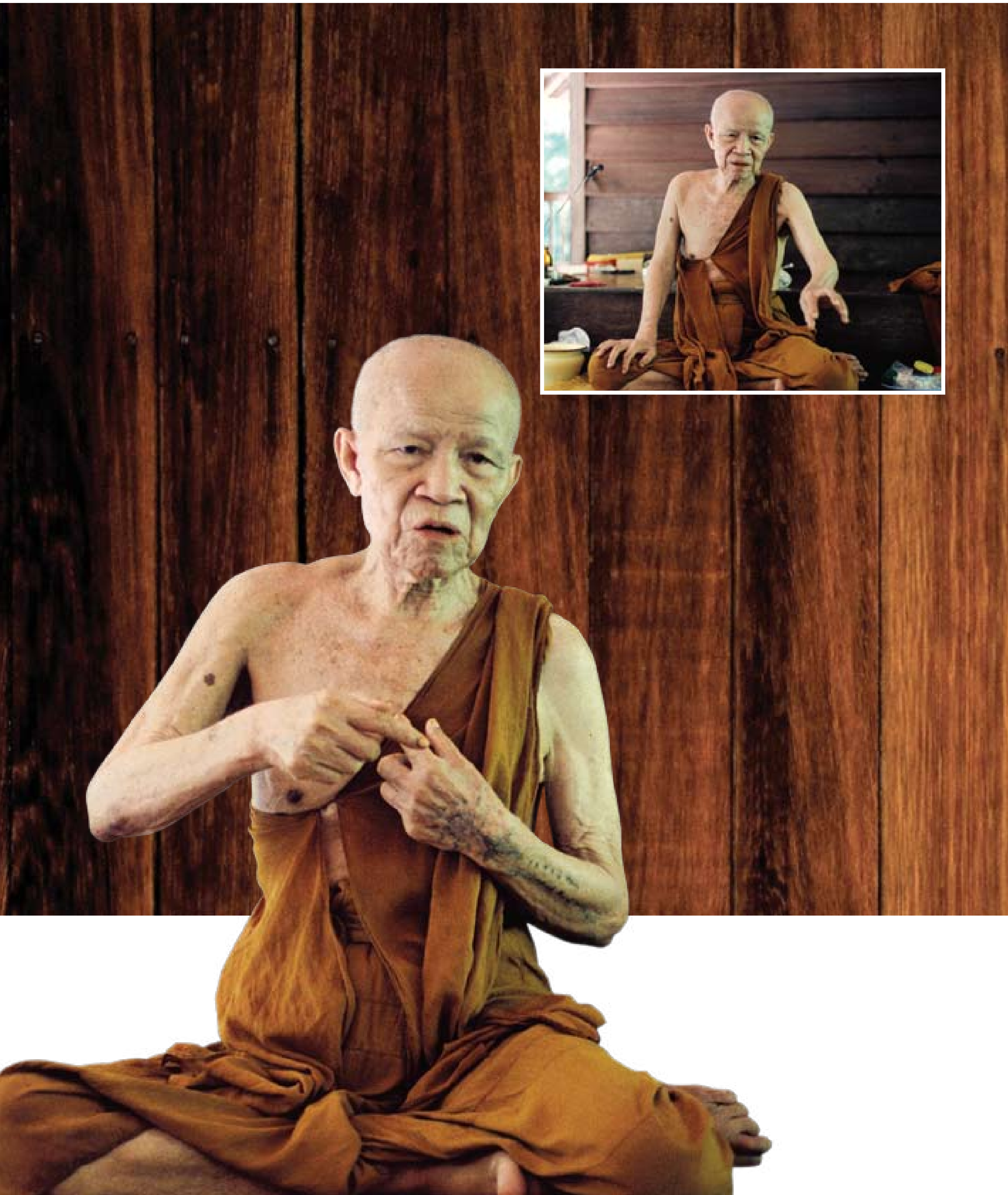
When that nature which we believe to be so magnificent and amazing finally disintegrates, something that is impossible to describe arises in full measure. That nature is absolute purity of mind. When compared to that state of purity, the deluded mind that we once held to be so superb resembles a pile of cow dung, and the nature that was concealed by it appears to be pure gold. Which is more precious, pure gold or mushy cow dung? Even a baby sucking its thumb can answer, so we needn't waste our time and proclaim our stupidity by making comparisons.

This concludes the investigation of the mind. Upon reaching this level, the mind is cut off forever from birth and existence, severed completely from all manifestations of delusion and craving. When delusion is extinguished, conditioned phenomena – which give rise to pain and suffering – are also extinguished. They have disappeared from the mind. Conditioned phenomena such as thoughts continue to function in their own sphere but they no longer cause suffering. They simply give form and direction to mental activity. Consciousness arising in the mind is a pure and simple consciousness that no longer produces suffering. All sense media and the sense contact that they condition are just naturally occurring phenomena that exist according to their own intrinsic characteristics. They have no negative effect whatsoever on the mind that has successfully completed its task. This is the total cessation of the entire mass of suffering.

The mind is then free, vast and supremely empty, without limit and without bounds – totally expansive. Nothing encloses or obstructs it. All contradictions have been eliminated. When the mind knows, it knows only the truth; when it sees, it sees only the truth. This is true emptiness.

This concludes the work of a contemplative according to the principles of the Buddha's teachings. From the time of the Buddha down to the present, these principles have remained constant. There are no deficiencies or excesses in the principles of the Dhamma taught by the Buddha that would make them unable to keep up with the tricks and deceits of the various forms of delusion. The Buddha's teaching is called the Middle Way because it's the Dhamma that is always appropriate for countering every sort of delusion to the point where no delusion remains. This is how you should understand the power of the Middle Way. The release from pain and suffering is something with a value that transcends all three levels of existence. What can we find in any of the three levels of existence that is more fantastic than the heart's permanent release from all pain and suffering? When we understand this truth clearly, our efforts in the practice will advance steadily. We'll be ready to die in the battle for freedom from the heavy burden of delusion.









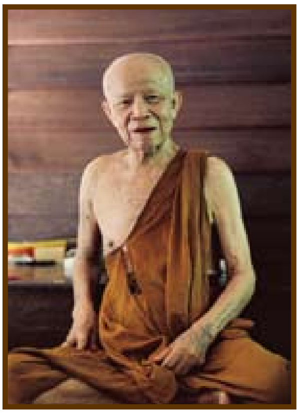
The Heart *of a* Samaṇa











In the time of the Buddha, samaṇas were revered for their asceticism. Having renounced the world for the purpose of transcending suffering, they became some of the Buddha's most accomplished disciples. Regardless of their social status, age or race, when they ordained under the Buddha's guidance, they changed their habitual ways of thinking, acting and speaking to the way of Dhamma. Casting the defilements aside, those disciples ceased to follow their lead from that moment on. With earnest effort, they directed all their energy toward purifying their hearts and cleansing them of the contamination created by the defilements.

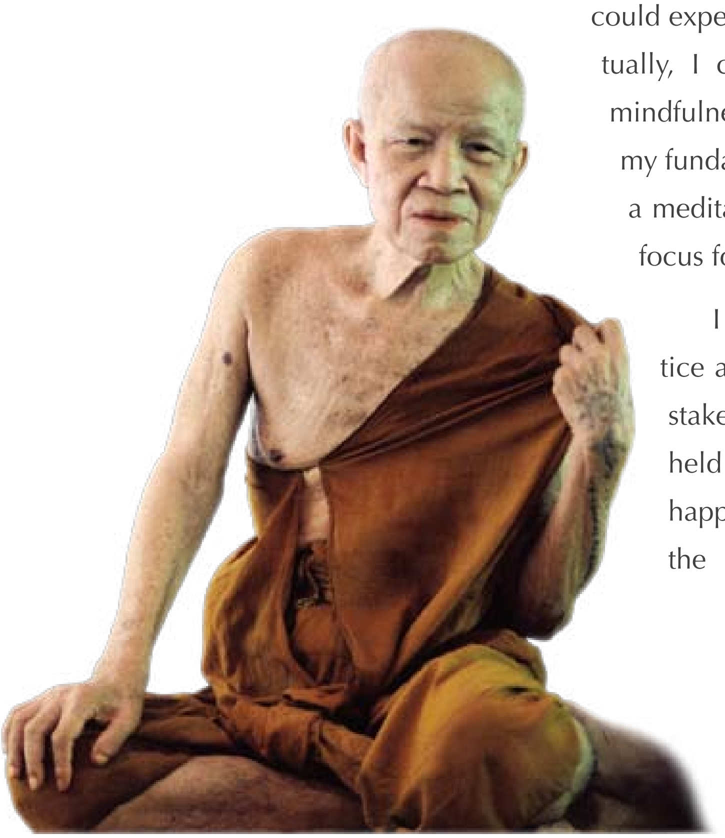
In essence, earnest effort is synonymous with the endeavor to maintain steady and continuous mindful awareness, always striving to keep a constant watch on the mind. When mindfulness oversees all our mental and emotional activities, at all times in all postures, this is called Right Effort. Whether we're engaged in formal meditation practice or not, if we earnestly endeavor to keep our minds firmly focused in the present moment, we constantly offset the threat posed by the defilements. The defilements work tirelessly to churn out thoughts of the past and the future. This distracts the mind, drawing it away from the present moment and from the mindful awareness that maintains our effort.

For this reason, we should not allow our minds to wander into worldly thoughts about the past or the future. Such thinking is invariably bound up with the defilements, and thus hinders practice. Instead of following the tendency of the defilements to focus externally on the affairs of the world outside, we must focus internally and become aware of the mind's inner world. This is essential.

Largely because they are not sufficiently resolute in applying basic principles of meditation, many practitioners fail to gain satisfactory results. If we simply focus attention on the presence of awareness in the mind without a meditation-word to anchor us, the results are bound to be hit and miss. The mind's awareness is too subtle to give mindfulness a firm basis, so the mind

soon strays into thinking and distraction – lured by the siren call of the defilements. Meditation practice then becomes patchy. At certain times it seems to progress smoothly, almost effortlessly, only to become suddenly and unexpectedly difficult. It falters, and all apparent progress disappears. With its confidence shaken, the mind is left floundering. However, if we use a meditation-word as an anchor to solidly ground our mindfulness, then the mind is sure to attain a state of meditative calm and concentration in the shortest possible time. It will also have the means to maintain that calm state with ease.

I am speaking here from personal experience. When I first began to meditate, my practice lacked a solid foundation. Since I had yet to discover the right method to look after my mind, my practice was in a state of constant flux. It would make steady progress for awhile only to decline rapidly and fall back to its original untutored condition. Due to the intense effort I exerted in the beginning, my mind succeeded in attaining a calm and concentrated state of samadhi. It felt as substantial and stable as a mountain. Still lacking a suitable method for maintaining this state, I took it easy and rested on my achievement. That was when my practice suffered a decline. My practice began to deteriorate, but I didn't know how to reverse the decline. So I thought long and hard, trying to find a firm basis on which I could expect to stabilize my mind. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that mindfulness had deserted me because my fundamentals were wrong: I lacked a meditation-word to act as a precise focus for my attention.



I was forced to begin my practice anew. This time, I first drove a stake firmly into the ground and held tightly to it no matter what happened. That stake was Buddho, the recollection of the Buddha.

I made the meditation-word Buddho the sole object of my attention. I focused on the mental repetition of Buddho to the exclusion of everything else. Buddho became my sole objective as I made sure that mindfulness was always in control to direct the effort. All thoughts of progress or decline were put aside. I would let happen whatever was going to happen. I was determined not to indulge in my old thought patterns: thinking about the past – when my practice was progressing nicely – and of how it collapsed; then thinking of the future, hoping that, somehow, through a strong desire to succeed, my previous sense of contentment would return on its own. All the while, I had failed to create the condition that would bring the desired results. I merely wished to see improvement, only to be disappointed when it failed to materialize. For, in truth, desire for success does not bring success; only mindful effort will.

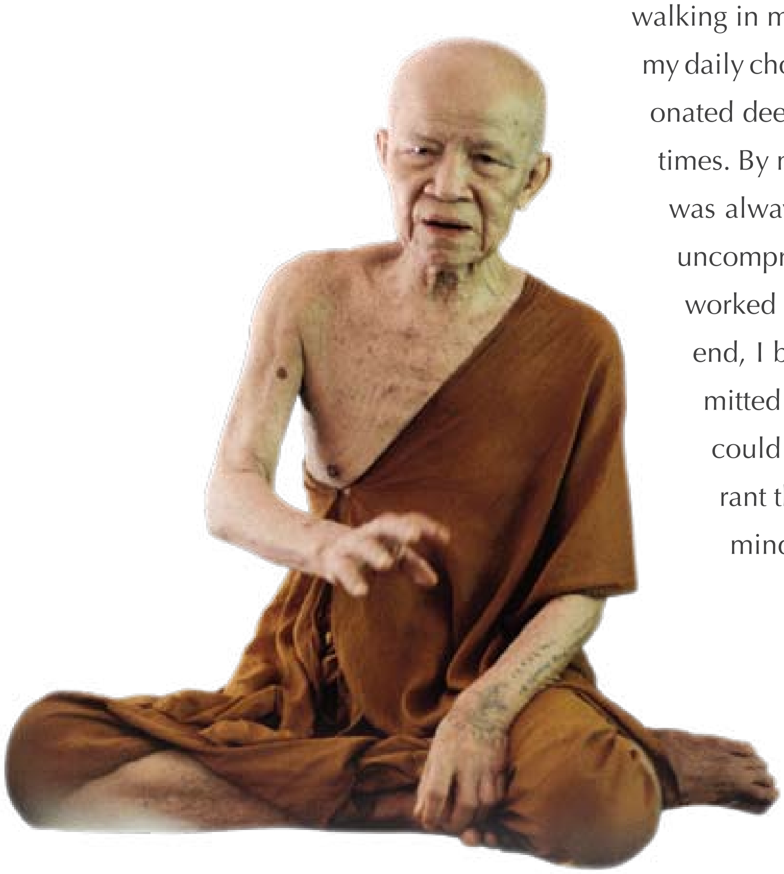
This time I resolved that, no matter what occurred, I should just let it happen. Fretting about progress and decline was a source of agitation, distracting me from the present moment and the work at hand. Only the mindful repetition of Buddho could prevent fluctuations in my meditation. It was paramount that I center the mind on awareness of the immediate present. Discursive thinking could not be allowed to disrupt concentration.

To practice meditation earnestly to attain an end to all suffering, you must be totally committed to the work at each successive stage of the path. Nothing less than total commitment will succeed. To experience the deepest levels of samadhi and achieve the most profound levels of wisdom, you cannot afford to be halfhearted and listless, forever wavering because you lack firm principles to guide your practice. Those without a firm commitment to the principles of practice can meditate their entire lives without gaining the proper results. In the initial stages of practice, you must find a stable object of meditation with which to anchor your mind. Don't just focus casually on an ambiguous object, like the awareness that is always present in the mind. Without a specific object of attention to hold your mind, it will be almost impossible to keep your attention from wandering. This is a recipe for failure. In the end, you'll become disappointed and give up trying.

When mindfulness loses its focus, the defilements rush in to drag your thoughts to a past long gone, or a future yet to come. The mind becomes unstable and strays aimlessly over the mental landscape, never remaining still or contented for a moment. This is how practitioners lose ground while watching their meditation practice collapse. The only antidote is a single, uncomplicated focal point of attention, such as a meditation-word or the breath. Choose one that seems most appropriate to you and focus steadfastly on that one object to the exclusion of everything else. Total commitment is essential to the task.

My choice was Buddho meditation. From the moment I made my resolve, I kept my mind from straying from the repetition of Buddho. From the moment I awoke in the morning until I slept at night, I forced myself to think only of Buddho. At the same time, I ceased to be preoccupied with thoughts of progress and decline: if my meditation made progress, it would do so with Buddho; if it declined, it would go down with Buddho. In either case, Buddho was my sole preoccupation. All other concerns were irrelevant.

Maintaining such single-minded concentration is not an easy task. I had to literally force my mind to remain entwined with Buddho each and every moment without interruption. Regardless of whether I was seated in meditation, walking in meditation or simply doing my daily chores, the word Buddho resonated deeply within my mind at all times. By nature and temperament, I was always extremely resolute and uncompromising. This tendency worked to my advantage. In the end, I became so earnestly committed to the task that nothing could shake my resolve; no errant thought could separate the mind from Buddho.



Working at this practice day after day, I always made certain that Buddho resonated in close harmony with my present-moment awareness. Soon, I began to see the results of calm and concentration arise clearly within the mind. At that stage, I began to see the very subtle and refined nature of the mind. The longer I internalized Buddho, the more subtle the mind became, until eventually the subtlety of Buddho and the subtlety of the mind melded into one another and became one and the same essence of knowing. I could not separate Buddho from the mind's subtle nature. Try as I might, I could no longer make the word Buddho appear in my mind. Through diligence and perseverance, Buddho had become so closely unified with the mind that Buddho itself no longer appeared within my awareness. The mind had become so calm and still, so profoundly subtle, that nothing – not even Buddho – resonated there.

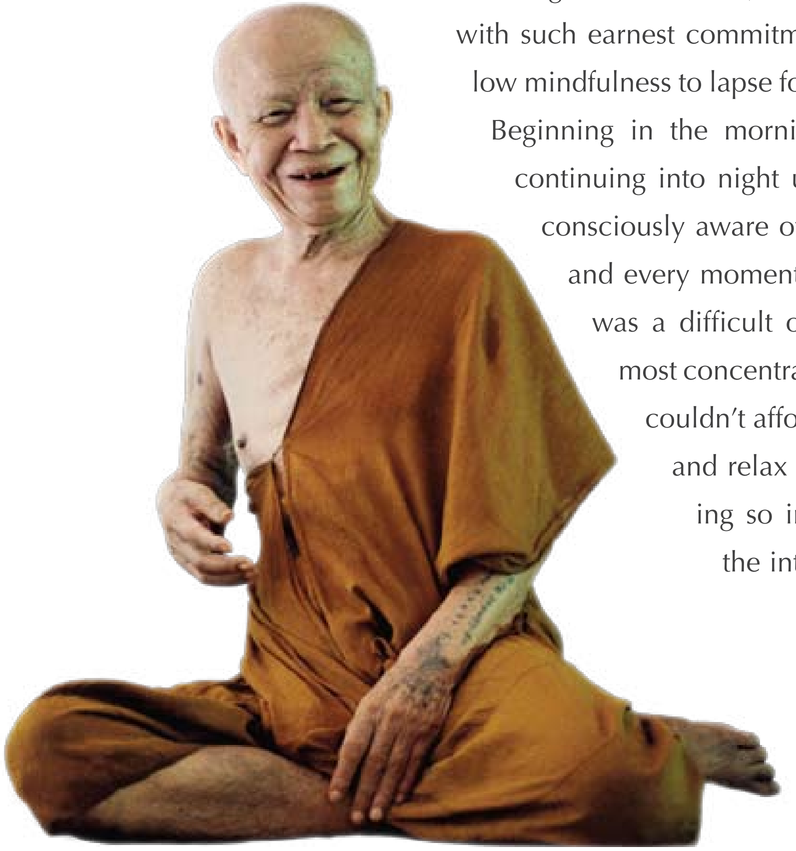
When this took place, I felt bewildered. I had predicated my whole practice on holding steadfastly to Buddho. Now that Buddho was no longer apparent, where would I focus my attention? Up to this point, Buddho had been my mainstay. Now it had disappeared. No matter how hard I tried to recover this focus, it was lost. I was in a quandary. All that remained in the mind was a pure and simple awareness, bright and clear. There was nothing concrete within that awareness to latch on to.

I realized then that nothing invades the mind's sphere of awareness when consciousness – its knowing presence – reaches such a profound and subtle condition. I was left with only one choice: with the loss of Buddho, I had to focus my attention on the essential sense of awareness and knowing that was all-present and prominent at that moment. That consciousness had not disappeared; on the contrary, it was all-pervasive. All of the mindful awareness that had concentrated on the repetition of Buddho was then firmly refocused on the very subtle knowing presence of the calm and converged mind. My attention remained firmly fixed on that subtle knowing essence until eventually its prominence began to fade, allowing my normal awareness to become reestablished.

As normal awareness returned, Buddho manifested itself once more. So I immediately refocused my attention on the repetition of my meditation-word.

Before long, my daily practice assumed a new rhythm: I concentrated intently on Buddho until consciousness resolved into the clear, brilliant state of awareness, remaining absorbed in that subtle knowing until normal awareness returned; and I then refocused with increased vigor on the repetition of Buddho. It was during this stage that I first gained a solid spiritual foundation in my meditation practice. From then on, my practice progressed steadily – never again did it fall into decline. With each passing day, my mind became increasingly calm, peaceful and concentrated. The fluctuations that had long plagued me ceased to be an issue. Concerns about the state of my practice were replaced by mindfulness rooted in the present moment. The intensity of this mindful presence was incompatible with thoughts of the past or future. My center of activity was the present moment – each silent repetition of Buddho as it arose and passed away. I had no interest in anything else. In the end, I was convinced that the reason for my mind's previous state of flux was a lack of mindfulness resulting from not anchoring my attention with a meditation-word. Instead, I had just focused on a general feeling of inner awareness without a specific object, allowing my mind to stray easily as thoughts intruded.

Once I understood the correct method for this initial stage of meditation, I applied myself to the task with such earnest commitment that I refused to allow mindfulness to lapse for even a single moment. Beginning in the morning when I awoke and continuing into night until I fell asleep, I was consciously aware of my meditation at each and every moment of my waking hours. It was a difficult ordeal, requiring the utmost concentration and perseverance. I couldn't afford to let down my guard and relax even for a moment. Being so intently concentrated on the internalization of Buddho,



I hardly noticed what went on around me. My normal daily interactions passed by in a blur, but Buddho was always sharply in focus. My commitment to the meditation-word was total. With this firm foundation to bolster my practice, mental calm and concentration became so unshakable that they felt as solid and unyielding as a mountain.

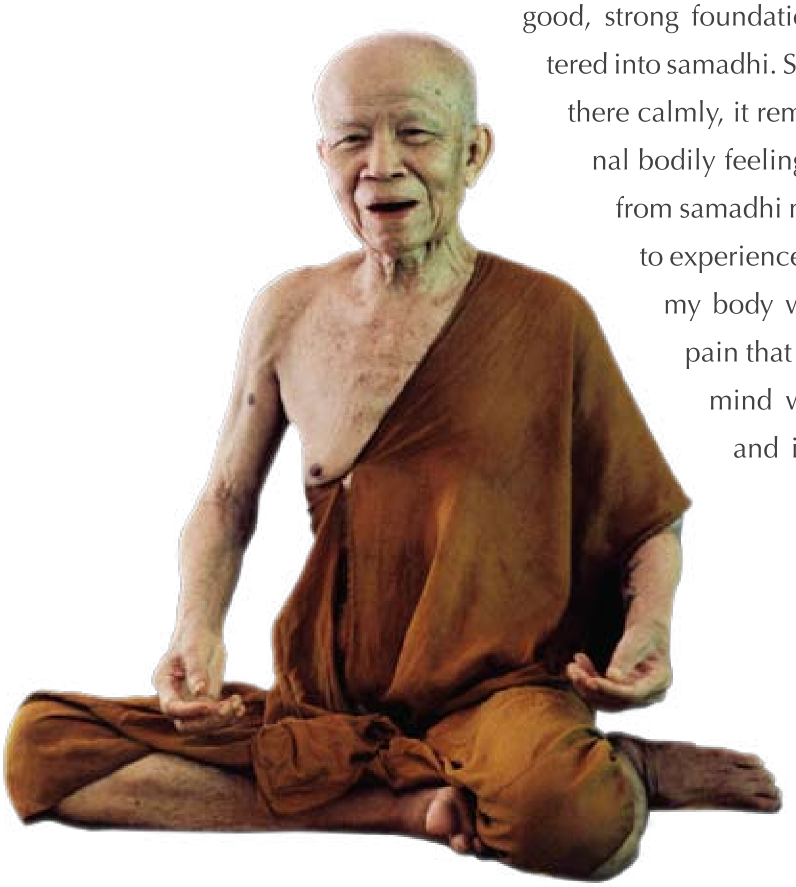
Eventually this rock-solid condition of the mind became the primary point of focus for mindfulness. As the mind steadily gained greater inner stability, resulting in a higher degree of integration, the meditation-word Buddho gradually faded from awareness, leaving the calm and concentrated state of the mind's essential knowing nature to be perceived prominently on its own. By that stage, the mind had advanced to samadhi – an intense state of focused awareness, assuming a life of its own, independent of any meditation technique. Fully calm and unified, the knowing presence itself became the sole focus of attention, a condition of mind so prominent and powerful that nothing can arise to dislodge it. This is known as the mind being in a state of continuous samadhi. In other words, the mind is samadhi – both are one and the same.

Speaking in terms of the deeper levels of meditation practice, a fundamental difference exists between a state of meditative calm and the samadhi state. When the mind converges and drops into a calm, concentrated state to remain for a period of time before withdrawing to normal consciousness, this is known as meditative calm. The calm and concentration are temporary conditions that last while the mind remains fixed in that peaceful state. As normal consciousness returns, these extraordinary conditions gradually dissipate. However, as we become more adept at this practice – entering into and withdrawing from a calm, unified state over and over again – the mind begins to build a solid inner foundation. When this foundation becomes unshakable in all circumstances, the mind is known to be in a state of continuous samadhi. Then, even when the mind withdraws from meditative calm, it still feels solid and compact, as though nothing can disturb its inward focus.

The mind that is continuously unified in samadhi is always even and unperturbed. It feels completely satiated. Because of the very compact and con-

centrated sense of inner unity, everyday thoughts and emotions no longer make an impact. In such a state, the mind has no desire to think about anything. Completely peaceful and content within itself, nothing is felt to be lacking. In such a state of continuous calm and concentration, the mind becomes very powerful. While the mind was previously hungry to experience thoughts and emotions, it now shuns them as a nuisance. Before, it was so agitated that it couldn't stop thinking and imagining even if it wanted to. Now, with samadhi as its habitual condition, the mind feels no desire to think about anything. It views thought as an unwanted disturbance. When the mind's awareness stands out prominently all the time, the mind is so inwardly concentrated that it tolerates no disturbance. Because of this sublime tranquility – and the tendency of samadhi to lull the mind into this state of serene satisfaction – those whose minds have attained continuous samadhi tend to become strongly attached to it. This remains so until one reaches the level of practice where wisdom prevails and the results become even more satisfying.

From that point on, I accelerated my efforts. It was at that time that I began sitting in meditation all night long, from dusk until dawn. While sitting one night, I started focusing inward as usual. Because it had already developed a good, strong foundation, the mind easily entered into samadhi. So long as the mind rested there calmly, it remained unaware of external bodily feelings. But when I withdrew from samadhi many hours later, I began to experience them in full. Eventually, my body was so racked by severe pain that I could hardly cope. The mind was suddenly unnerved, and its good, strong founda-



tion completely collapsed. The entire body was filled with such excruciating pain that it quivered all over.

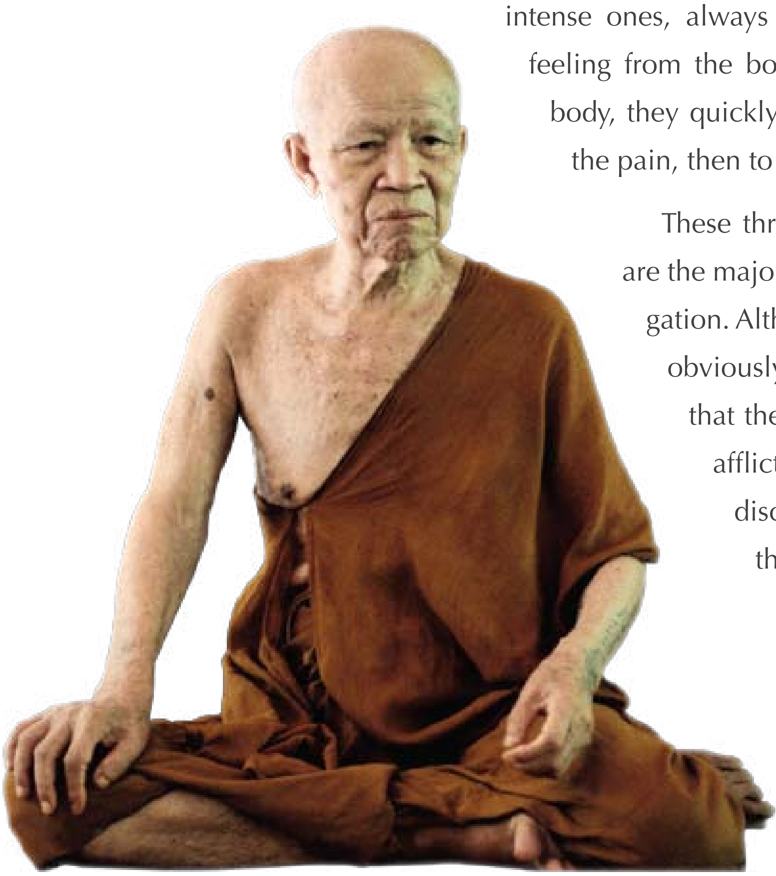
Thus began the bout of hand-to-hand combat that gave me insight into an important meditation technique. Until the unexpected appearance of such severe pain, I had not thought of trying to sit all night. I had never made a resolution of that kind. I was simply practicing seated meditation as I normally did, but when the pain began to overwhelm me, I thought: "Hey, what's going on here? I must make every effort to figure out this pain tonight." So I made the solemn resolve that no matter what happened I would not get up from my seat until dawn of the next day. I was determined to investigate the nature of pain until I understood it clearly and distinctly. I would have to dig deep. But, if need be, I was willing to die in order to find out the truth about pain.

Wisdom began to tackle this problem in earnest. Before I found myself cornered like that with no way out, I never imagined that wisdom could be so sharp and incisive. It went to work, relentlessly whirling around as it probed into the source of the pain with the determination of a warrior who never retreats or accepts defeat. This experience convinced me that in moments of real crisis wisdom arises to meet the challenge. We are not fated to be ignorant forever – when truly backed into a corner, we are bound to be able to find a way to help ourselves. It happened to me that night. When I was cornered and overwhelmed by severe pain, mindfulness and wisdom just dug into the painful feelings.

The pain began as hot flashes along the backs of my hands and feet, but that was really quite mild. When it arose in full force, the entire body was ablaze with pain. All the bones, and the joints connecting them, were like fuel feeding the fire that engulfed the body. It felt as though every bone in my body was breaking apart; as though my neck would snap and my head drop to the floor. When all parts of the body hurt at once, the pain is so intense that one doesn't know how to begin stemming the tide long enough just to breathe.

This crisis left mindfulness and wisdom with no alternative but to dig deep into the pain, searching for the exact spot where it felt most severe. Mindfulness and wisdom probed and investigated right where the pain was greatest, trying to isolate it so as to see it clearly. "Where does this pain originate? Who suffers the pain?" They asked these questions of each bodily part and found that each one of them remained in keeping with its own intrinsic nature. The skin was skin, the flesh was flesh, the tendons were tendons and so forth. They had been so from the day of birth. Pain, on the other hand, is something that comes and goes periodically; it's not always there in the same way that flesh and skin are. Ordinarily, the pain and the body appear to be all bound up together. But are they really?

Focusing inward, I could see that each part of the body was a physical reality. What is real stays that way. As I searched the mass of bodily pain, I saw that one point was more severe than all the others. If pain and body are one, and all parts of the body are equally real, then why was the pain stronger in one part than in another? So I tried to separate out and isolate each aspect. At that point in the investigation, mindfulness and wisdom were indispensable. They had to sweep through the areas that hurt and then whirl around the most intense ones, always working to separate the feeling from the body. Having observed the body, they quickly shifted their attention to the pain, then to the mind.



These three: body, pain and mind are the major principles in this investigation. Although the bodily pain was obviously very strong, I could see that the mind was calm and unafflicted. No matter how much discomfort the body suffered, the mind was not distressed or agitated. This intrigued

me. Normally the defilements join forces with pain, and this alliance causes the mind to be disturbed by the body's suffering. This prompted wisdom to probe into the nature of the body, the nature of pain and the nature of the mind until all three were perceived clearly as separate realities, each true in its own natural sphere.

I saw clearly that it was the mind that defined feeling as being painful and unpleasant. Otherwise, pain was merely a natural phenomenon that occurred. It was not an integral part of the body, nor was it intrinsic to the mind. As soon as this principle became absolutely clear, the pain vanished in an instant. At that moment, the body was simply the body – a separate reality on its own. Pain was simply feeling, and in a flash that feeling vanished straight into the mind. As soon as the pain vanished into the mind, the mind knew that the pain had disappeared. It just vanished without a trace.

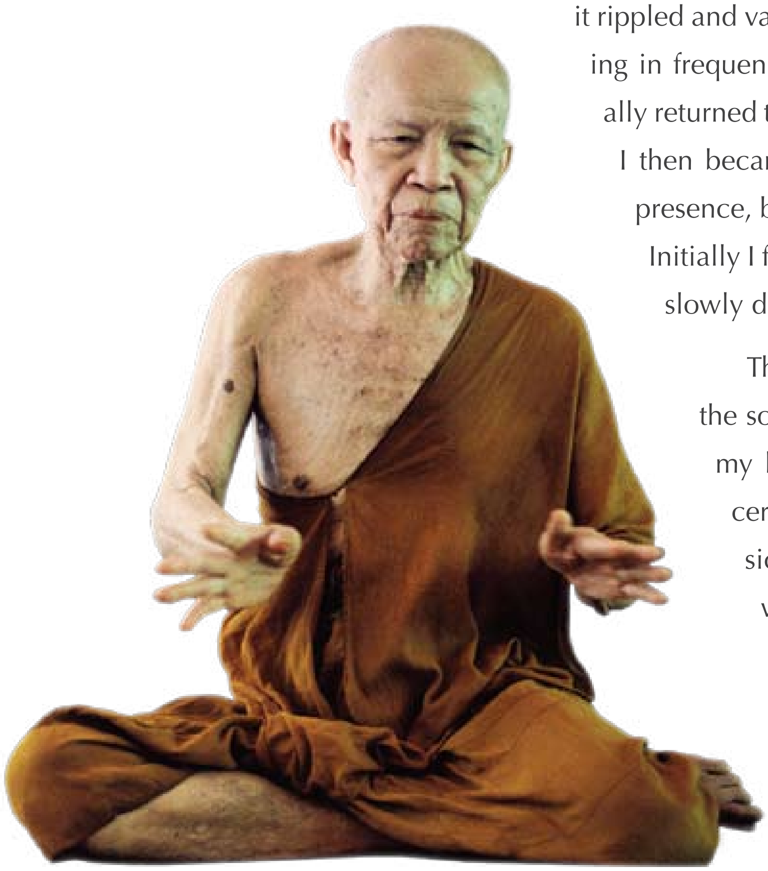
In addition, the entire physical body vanished from awareness. At that moment I was not consciously aware of the body at all. Only a simple and harmonious awareness remained, alone on its own. That's all. The mind was so exceedingly refined as to be indescribable. It simply knew – a profoundly subtle inner state of awareness pervaded. The body had completely disappeared. Although my physical form still sat in meditation, I was completely unconscious of it. The pain too had disappeared. No physical feelings were left at all. Only the mind's essential awareness remained. All thinking had stopped; the mind was not forming a single thought. When thinking ceases, not the slightest movement disturbs the inner stillness. Unwavering, the mind remains firmly fixed in its own solitude.

Due to the power of mindfulness and wisdom, the hot, searing pain that afflicted my body had vanished completely. Even my body had disappeared from consciousness. The knowing presence existed alone, as though suspended in midair. It was totally empty, but at the same time vibrantly aware. Because the physical elements did not interact with it, the mind had no sense that the body existed. This knowing presence was a pure and solitary awareness that

was not connected to anything whatsoever. It was awesome, majestic and truly magnificent.

It was an incredibly amazing experience. The pain was completely gone. The body had disappeared. An awareness so fine and subtle that I cannot describe it was the only thing not to disappear. It simply appeared; that's all I can say. It was a truly amazing inner state of being. There was no movement – not even the slightest rippling – inside the mind. It remained fully absorbed in stillness until enough time had elapsed, then it stirred as it began to withdraw from samadhi. It rippled briefly and then went quiet again.

This rippling happens naturally of its own accord. It cannot be intended. Any intention brings the mind right back to normal consciousness. When the mind absorbed in stillness has had enough, it begins to stir. It is aware that a ripple stirs briefly and then ceases. Some moments later it ripples briefly again, disappearing in the same instant. Gradually, the rippling becomes more and more frequent. When the mind has converged to the very base of samadhi, it does not withdraw all at once. This was very evident to me. The mind rippled only slightly, meaning that a thought formed briefly only to disappear before it could become intelligible. Having rippled, it just vanished. Again and again it rippled and vanished, gradually increasing in frequency until my mind eventually returned to ordinary consciousness. I then became aware of my physical presence, but the pain was still gone. Initially I felt no pain at all, and only slowly did it begin to reappear.



This experience reinforced the solid spiritual foundation in my heart with an unshakable certainty. I had realized a basic principle in contending with pain: pain, body and

mind are all distinctly separate phenomena. But because of a single mental defilement – delusion – they all converge into one. Delusion pervades the mind like an insidious poison, contaminating our perceptions and distorting the truth. Pain is simply a natural phenomenon that occurs on its own. But when we grab hold of it as a burning discomfort, it immediately becomes hot – because our defining it in that way makes it hot.

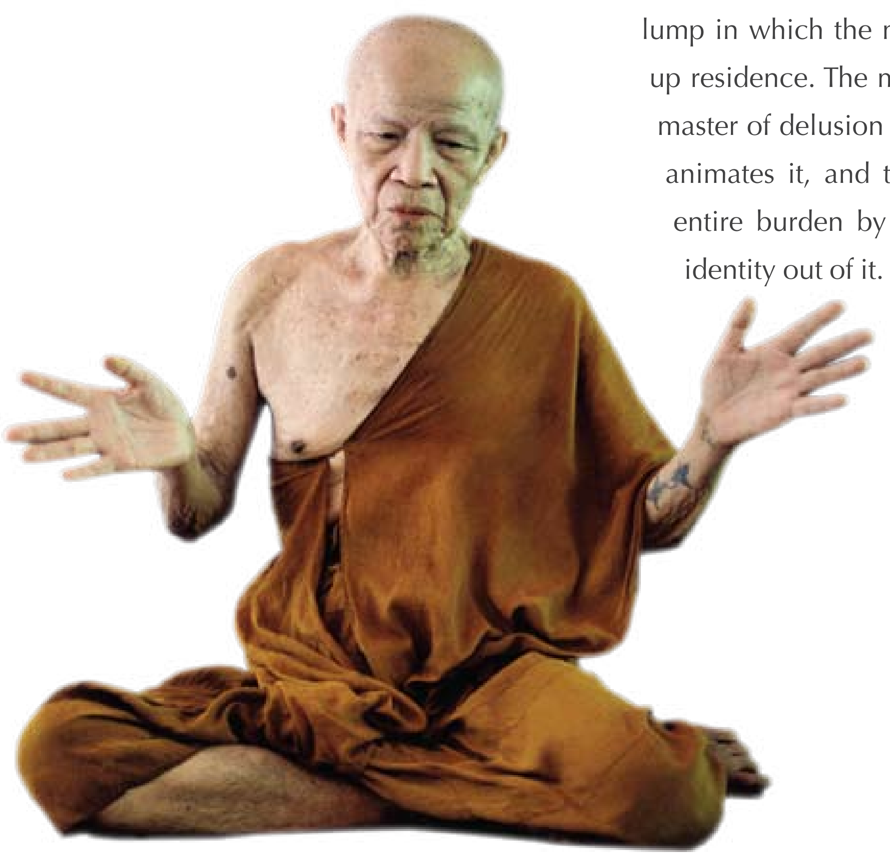
After awhile the pain returned, so I had to tackle it again – without retreating. I probed deep into the painful feelings, investigating them as I had done before. But this time, I could not use the same investigative techniques that I had previously used to such good effect. Techniques employed in the past were no longer relevant to the present moment. In order to keep pace with internal events as they unfolded, I needed fresh tactics, newly devised by mindfulness and wisdom and tailor-made for present circumstances. The nature of the pain was still the same, but the tactics had to be suitable to the immediate conditions. Even though I had used them successfully once before, I could not remedy the new situation by holding on to old investigative techniques. Fresh, innovative techniques were required, ones devised in the heat of battle to deal with present-moment conditions. Mindfulness and wisdom went to work anew, and before long the mind once again converged to the very base of samadhi.

During the course of that night, the mind converged like this three times, but I had to engage in bouts of hand-to-hand combat each time. After the third time, dawn came, bringing to a close that decisive showdown. The mind emerged bold, exultant and utterly fearless. Fear of death ceased that night.

Painful feelings are just naturally occurring phenomena that constantly fluctuate between mild and severe. As long as we do not make them into a personal burden, they don't have any special meaning for the mind. In and of itself, pain means nothing, so the mind remains unaffected. The physical body is also meaningless in and of itself, and it adds no meaning either to feelings or to oneself – unless, of course, the mind invests it with a specific meaning, gathering in the resultant suffering to burn itself. External conditions are not really responsible for our suffering, only the mind can create that.

Getting up that morning, I felt indescribably bold and daring. I marveled at the amazing nature of my experience. Nothing comparable had ever happened in my meditation before. The mind had completely severed its connection with all objects of attention, converging inward with true courage. It had converged into that majestic stillness because of my thorough and painstaking investigations. When it withdrew, it was still full of an audacious courage that knew no fear of death. I now knew the right investigative techniques, so I was certain that I'd have no fear the next time pain appeared. It would, after all, be pain with just the same characteristics. The physical body would be the same old body. And wisdom would be the same faculty I had used before. For this reason, I felt openly defiant, without fear of pain or death.

Once wisdom had come to realize the true nature of what dies and what does not, death became something quite ordinary. Hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, bones: reduced to their original elemental form, they are simply the earth element. Since when did the earth element ever die? When they decompose and disintegrate, what do they become? All parts of the body revert to their original properties. The earth and water elements revert to their original properties, as do the wind and fire elements. Nothing is annihilated. Those elements have simply come together to form a lump in which the mind then takes up residence. The mind – the great master of delusion – comes in and animates it, and then carries the entire burden by making a self-identity out of it. "This is me, this



belongs to me." Reserving the whole mass for itself, the mind accumulates endless amounts of pain and suffering, burning itself with its own false assumptions.

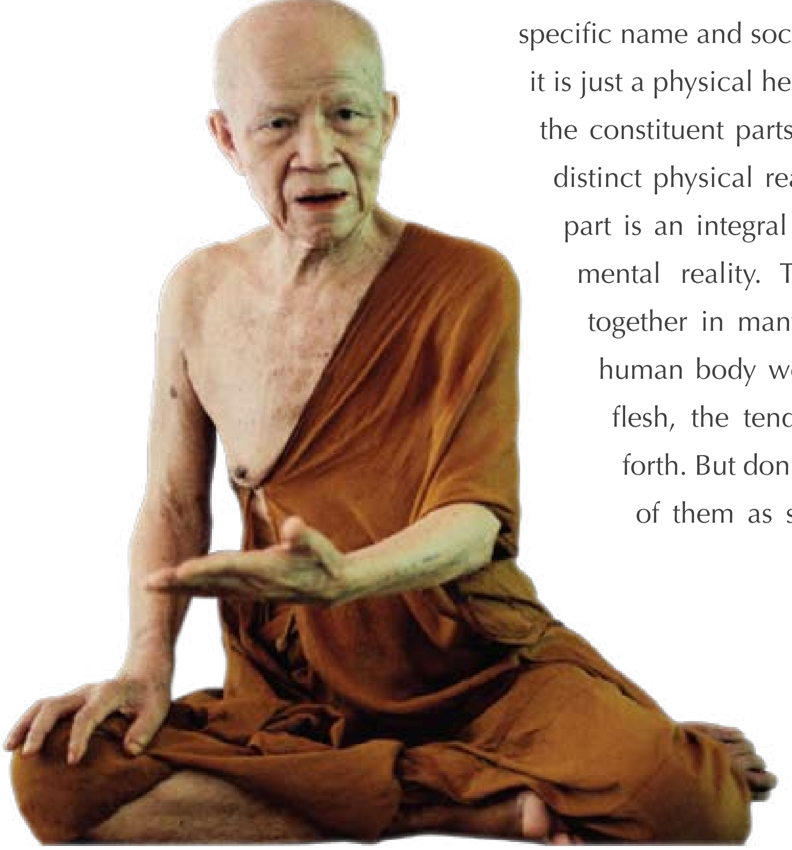
The mind itself is the real culprit, not the lump of physical elements. The body is not some hostile entity whose constant fluctuations threaten our well-being. It is a separate reality that changes naturally according to its own inherent conditions. Only when we make false assumptions about it does it become a burden we must carry. That is precisely why we suffer from bodily pain and discomfort. The physical body does not produce suffering for us; we ourselves produce it. Thus I saw clearly that no external conditions can cause us to suffer. We are the ones who misconceive things, and that misconception creates the blaze of pain that troubles our hearts.

I understood clearly that nothing dies. The mind certainly doesn't die; in fact, it becomes more pronounced. The more fully we investigate the four elements, breaking them down into their original properties, the more distinctly pronounced the mind appears. So where is death to be found? And what is it that dies? The four elements – earth, water, wind and fire – they don't die. As for the mind, how can it die? It becomes more conspicuous, more aware and more insightful. The mind's awareness never dies, so why is it so afraid of death? Because it deceives itself. For eons and eons, it has fooled itself into believing in death when actually nothing ever dies.

So when pain arises in the body, we must realize that it is merely feeling, and nothing else. Don't define it in personal terms and assume that it is something happening to you. Pains have afflicted your body since the day you were born. The pain that you experienced at the moment you emerged from your mother's womb was excruciating. Only by surviving such torment are human beings born. Pain has been there from the very beginning, and it's not about to reverse course or alter its character. Bodily pain always exhibits the same basic characteristics: having arisen, it remains briefly and then ceases. Arising, remaining briefly, ceasing – that's all there is to it.

Investigate painful feelings arising in the body so as to see them clearly for what they are. The body itself is merely a physical form, the physical reality you have known since birth. But when you believe that you are your body, and your body hurts, then you are in pain. Being equated, body, pain and the awareness that perceives them then converge into one: your painful body. Physical pain arises due to some bodily malfunction. It arises dependent on some aspect of the body, but it is not itself a physical phenomenon. Awareness of both body and feelings is dependent on the mind – the one who knows them. But when the one who's aware of them knows them falsely, then concern about the physical cause of the pain and its apparent intensity cause emotional pain to arise. Pain not only hurts, but it indicates that there is something wrong with you – your body. Unless you can separate out these three distinct realities, physical pain will always cause emotional distress.

The body is merely a physical phenomenon. We can believe whatever we like about it, but that will not alter fundamental principles of truth. Physical existence is one such fundamental truth. Four elemental properties – earth, water, wind and fire – gather together in a certain configuration to form what is called a "person". This physical presence may be identified as a man or a woman and be given a specific name and social status, but essentially it is just a physical heap. Lumped together, all the constituent parts form a human body, a distinct physical reality. And each separate part is an integral part of that one fundamental reality. The four elements join together in many different ways. In the human body we speak of the skin, the flesh, the tendons, the bones and so forth. But don't be fooled into thinking of them as separate realities simply



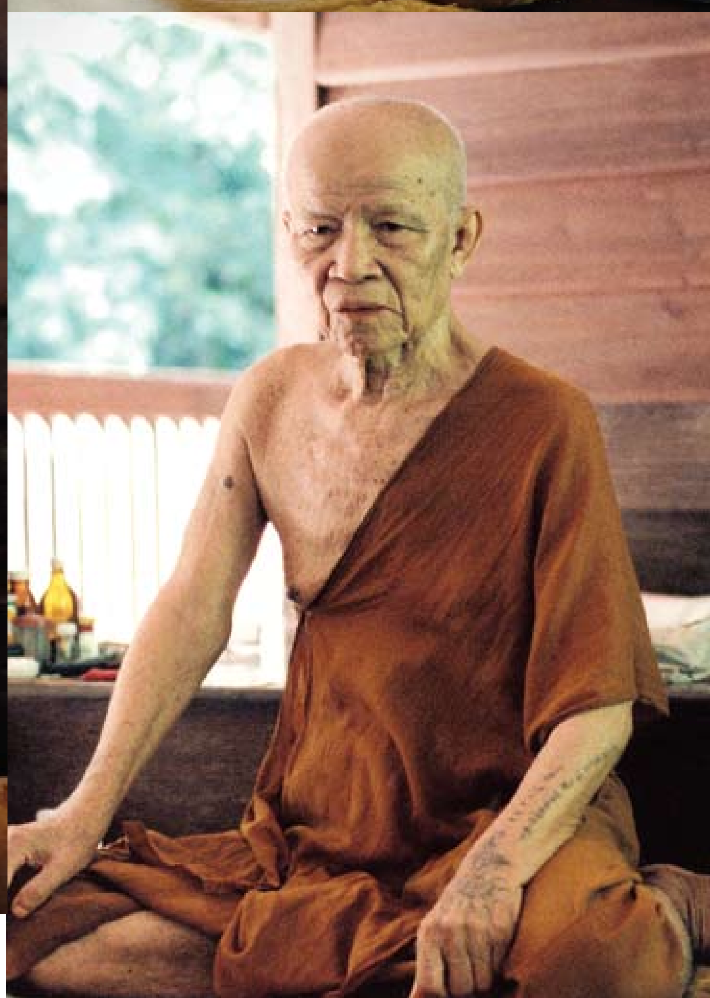
because they have different names. See them all as one essential reality – the physical heap.

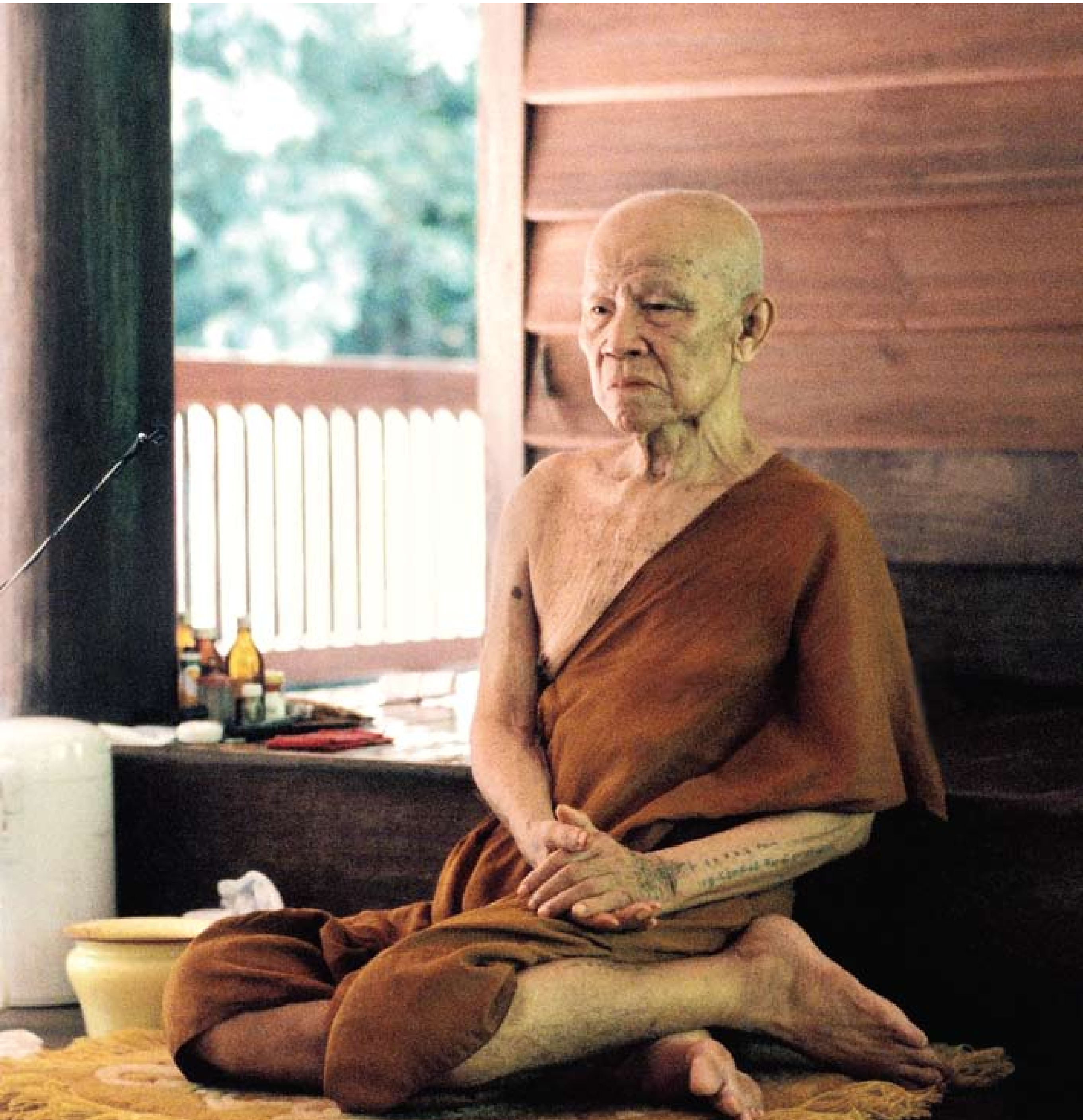
As for the heap of feelings, they exist in their own sphere. They are not part of the physical body. The body isn't feeling either. It has no direct part in physical pain. These two heaps – body and feeling – are more prominent than the heaps of memory, thought and consciousness which, because they vanish as soon as they arise, are far more difficult to see. Feelings, on the other hand, remain briefly before they vanish. This causes them to standout, making them easier to isolate during meditation.

Focus directly on painful feelings when they arise and strive to understand their true nature. Confront the challenge head on. Don't try to avoid the pain by focusing your attention elsewhere. And resist any temptation to wish for the pain to go away. The purpose of the investigation must be a search for true understanding. The neutralization of pain is merely a byproduct of the clear understanding of the principles of truth. It cannot be taken as the primary objective. That will only create the conditions for greater emotional stress when the relief one wishes for fails to materialize. Stoic endurance in the face of intense pain will not succeed either. Nor will concentrating single-mindedly on pain to the exclusion of the body and the mind. In order to achieve the proper results, all three factors must be included in the investigation. The investigation must always be direct and purposeful.

The Lord Buddha – the Great Samaṇa – taught us to investigate with the aim of seeing the Noble Truth of Suffering: that all pain is simply a phenomenon that arises, remains briefly and then vanishes. Don't become entangled in it. Don't view the pain in personal terms, as an inseparable part of who you are, for that runs counter to pain's true nature. Such a view undermines the techniques used to investigate pain, preventing wisdom from knowing the reality of feelings. Don't create a problem for yourself where none exists. See the Noble Truth of Suffering as it arises in each moment of pain, observing the feeling as it remains briefly and vanishes. That's all there is to pain.


































































On January 30, 2011 at the age of 97, Luangta Maha Boowa shed his physical form and totally departed this world. The death of a Buddha or an Arahant disciple is known as Parinibbana. Luangta Maha Boowa left those who lived and practiced with him in no doubt that he was truly a Noble disciple in the lineage of the Lord Buddha, and a Samaṇa of the highest blessing.



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